



HELPING  
YOUR  
HEALTH  
WITH HORSES

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## Helping Your Health With Horses

A Brief Introduction to Equine Assisted Learning

For Anyone Looking for Inspiration and Answers

## Shout Outs to:

Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning

Harmony Farm Equineimity

Rancho Encino

Leading Edge Professional Development

Burrdan Acres

## PREFACE

Equine Assisted Learning has taken many forms over the years. It has evolved, adapted and proven to make a difference in people's lives. We have Equine Assisted Learning Facilitators, Equine Assisted Therapy, Equine Experiential Learning, Equusoma and many more. Literally, they are here to "help heal people", this could be through soft skills, life skills, team building, leadership programs, psychotherapy, somatic therapy and more.

So how does it work? We know it involves horses but how exactly? Unlike the sports world where a horse is either ridden or driven by pulling a cart or wagon, Equine Assisted Learning horses teach you by being beside you. Now I'm not saying we set them up with a blackboard and chalk whilst you sit in chairs listening to what they have to say. There aren't enough distinguishable "neighs" for that. However, you do have to listen to them. I can see minds being boggled here so I will expand upon what I've said.

Horses are prey animals, they have fight or flight instincts that are prebuilt into them from a long time ago. Their nervous system is similar to our sympathetic nervous system which we can sometimes feel in our gut as a "something's wrong" feeling. Our intuition has lessened a lot over the years and rightly so, it isn't often we walk down the street and find ourselves being chased by a lion. Well not in North America anyway. We've toned down our primitive or reptilian brain because we are the apex predator. Horses haven't, their intuition is still strong and readily shown in body language. As an Equine Assisted Learning Facilitator we are taught to read these signs. We don't watch you, the horse is doing that and we interpret their reactions to what you're doing and the feelings you are projecting.

An interesting aspect right? We're helping you through the horse teaming alongside you. Horses are highly receptive to mood changes, fear, laughter, confusion, lack of confidence and many other things that you unwittingly display. When they react we step in with questions to determine what the stumble or problem is. This experiential objective learning helps you figure things out, help you learn skills that you will always remember and put into use again and again.

Your horse is your confidant. This beautiful being brings calm back into your life. Their patience helps you format new ways of thinking, improves critical thinking and improves your self-esteem as they guide you to an empowered you. They don't care who you are, what you look like or what you've done.

What they do want is balance, safety (just like we do). As they feel safe in the herd, they help you become better balanced in society. The wonderful nature of Equine Assisted Learning is that we can make many parallels to the herd and to society. This is where we set the challenges and you solve them with your horse partner. What happens next is both amazing and real.

You leave with a new skill set from every program. One week may be working on communication, another week team-building. You can take the programs alone, in adult groups, work groups, children's groups, care-givers and people with disabilities, the list is endless for how many people these programs can help. Hence, there are many different programs of Equine Assisted Learning out there. Many facilitators focus on a niche, something they know they're good at and have experience with. A qualified therapist will focus on what their Master's degree is in.

I'm coming to you today from some of the views of Equine Connection - Academy of Equine Assisted Learning. These are their programs that they have evolved from creator Tamara McKinnon. These programs were sent to three different universities to use and study over a five year period. The conclusions from all were that these programs are effective and proven to work.

Some of the narrative is written by myself for Equine Connection - Academy of Equine Assisted Learning and some stories remain in their own words. I have included my own facilitating experiences for those who like narratives. Others I have left as they were sent to me by the facilitator. The aspects of all these stories are unique and because they're written in the words of the facilitator who wrote them, they span a selection of styles that will keep your interest. A huge thank you to all who participated in the writing of this book. Your words will help inspire others.

Of course a thank you has to go out to our clients, the people that believe in us and trust us. If they hadn't opened up their hearts to our horses we wouldn't have these stories to tell.

All of these stories show how horses help us to delve deeper within ourselves. When we do that we find our answers to the problems that can often be so overwhelming that we often don't want to visit them without a little push. Horses are the little push.

Horses offer a space of safety, a massive presence of energy that we absorb with thankfulness to fill the empty area that has been expelled, often to nothing. These beautiful, powerful beings serve us. We don't know why it is inherent to the herd that they help us. What we do know is they help each other to keep the herd safe and content. We do, however, respect and appreciate their positive energy to help us overcome our negative ones.

I don't want to go into more detail here as that can become overwhelming but as your Kari's great grandma said, "the proof is in the pudding" so let's get onto specific programs and stories and how they affected clients with their results.

Enjoy this anthology of around the world experiences.

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# Helping Your Health With Horses

## Chapter One

### The Anti-bullying Program

At Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning our principle mandate is to help everyone. Our Equine Assisted Learning Facilitator certification programs are worldwide and through our network of Equine Assisted Learning Facilitators we are able to assist people in many countries. There are many ways that we can affect change by using horses as teachers, however, adapting programs to specific categories helps with focusing on more specific problems.

The anti-bullying program is one of them used for both the bullied and the bullies, this program has proven effective time and again. The children attending have often been to the principal's office several times with issues either from being a bully or from being bullied. Plus, there are a considerable amount of behavioural issues including, FAS, ADD, OCD, ODD, etc. acronyms for labels that the children are recognized for rather than the individuals they can become.

The Equine Connection anti-bullying program has been featured on the Disney Channel. It is a proven course that helps school children find their voices, become leaders, believe in themselves, learn empathy and cooperation.

This Is THEIR Story:

## Story of Daisy - The Bullied - Week One

*From Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning*

*Adapted to Non-Fiction Narrative by Krystyna Faroe*

I sit on the bus and listen, the children are loud with excitement. They lean over the seats and yell at each other as if everyone on board is deaf. I almost wish I was. As the bus turns up a laneway I let my eyes scan the flat Calgary plains. Horses are standing in a line as if ready to be part of a midway in the shooting section, ready to flop down when someone correctly strikes them. As if by extra sensory perception one of the horses buckles at the knees and lies down. I smile but it's quickly gone.

My heart is breaking for these children that I sit amongst. I see the pretense in their faces that nothing is wrong. I wish that to be true but it isn't. As in so many schools my class is filled with those that do not fit in. They fight to fit in, literally. They try but they fail and their anger gets the best of them. Today? Today they are happy. A new adventure, new experience, hope?

Their eyes are bright as they scramble over to look at the horses on one side. Normally they would be reprimanded but not today. The bus driver sees and says nothing, as do I. The rush of moving gravel holds my ears for a moment over the sound of *wow* and *look there's more horses over there*, for now they're paying attention.

We halt with a jerk, the children already rushing to the front of the bus as I wearily rise from my seat. Will it be another clamouring and boisterously busy day? I find myself shaking my head of past memories. I'm too tired to do this but I must. My

education assistant is looking at me with the same eyes so I smile, encouraging her that we'll be okay. I wonder how long I can keep lying to her and myself.

"Children, line up nicely please and don't fall onto our kind bus driver."

I wade my way through them. Only eight children but they're more like a whole class. I have too few eyes to keep on them all as does Mrs. Clements. I give an apologetic look to the driver, his face offers his own sympathy to me. I smile, I know it doesn't reach my eyes and I hate that I am being fake.

Mrs. Clements is at the back of the children as we step off the bus. I grab hold of Stephen as he attempts to make a run to the field of horses.

"No, you don't Stephen, get back into line." I don't raise my voice. I've found saying words softly gets their attention better as they strain to hear what's being said.

Bobby and Jack are pushing one another around as Mrs. Clements steps in and breaks up their actions. We'd better get them all inside quickly before chaos erupts.

"Follow me children." I stride towards the large wooden door of the building, listening to the crunch of gravel behind me. I follow the stepping stones up to the door before making sure my crew of *wildlings* are with me. For once they are. It seems the prospect of meeting horses has them fully on board.

How do I feel about it? Terrified! Huge beasts and children seem like a disaster waiting to happen. I realize my heart is beating hard and take a deep breath in and out to calm myself. My sweaty palms believe that it is helping. Firmly pushing the door open I hold it for our little troop to walk through, counting each one as they go through. I am thankful there are only seven. Mrs. Clements steps through

as well offering me a glance that says *we'll be okay*, I give the false smile back to her. Both of us are living a lie today.

On the other side of the door I see a huge friendly smile. It actually warms my heart from the cold grasp that is holding it and I have a moment of feeling this could work out. Then I see Stephen running off again and the moment halts as I rush to grab him yet again. Safely ensconced, my hand holding his, he swings his head back and forth to look at everything around him like a bobble-head toy. I sigh, feeling my age as I look upon his owl eyes and a matching open mouth that awaits flipped pennies.

“Hello guys,” positive words from the friendly face of an attractive young woman. She carries herself with authority and I let out another breath of air in thankfulness.

“I’m Carolyn!” Sweeping her hand to an open door she asserts, “follow me and meet Kari.”

The children are already past her as she says the last words, seeing where her hand is pointing is enough for them to get on with it. They’re through the door before all of the adults and I hear Kari introducing herself. I see swishing blonde hair moving amongst them as she guides them to chairs. Seats on which they sit, stand up, sit again and stand up, turn around to look through the glass into an arena where horses are standing. I’m glad to see it doesn’t bother her. She already knows the problems these children face every day and she’s knowledgeable enough to be lenient. My heart slows a little as my body relaxes.

I find a place behind the children, making sure they can focus on Carolyn and Kari who are now beside a board with numerous strips with words next to it. The energy they emote raises the excitement level of the children as they listen whilst they explain why they have horses as teachers.

The children giggle as Stephen asks “do we give an apple to the teacher?”

Kari and Carolyn laugh in response. “No apples or treats but we can give strokes and pats.” Kari’s smile offers a good question vibe.

Stephen draws himself up and I know he has a self-important expression on his face. He gives a quick smile to a friend beside him and I see the curve of his lips and puffed up chest. It makes me feel good to see this. It isn’t often they get to feel good about themselves. They’re already branded by most teachers as troublemakers.

As I watch Kari and Carolyn go through their opening speech they make eye contact with each and every child. The children’s sense of importance is raised and they all seem taller, bigger than they usually are, especially those that are bullied. They suddenly have an air of belonging and comfort. I’m impressed.

Through the use of a vinyl poster the children are shown the challenges they will be doing with their horse. They partially listen as the word horse has already sent them elsewhere. Probably galloping across plains towards mountain ranges. An objective word is given to them but I think it’s passed away on a floating cloud as they all shuffle in their seats in excitement and readiness for what’s to come. Of course they’re not ready and I hope all will be explained again when they’re in the arena. Kari and Carolyn grab helmets, handing them to each child and fitting them. Standing together, they look as if they are off to a skateboard park. I can see they’re chuffed and feel self-important at having to wear head protection. A thrill of potential danger bounces from one to another.

We’re all filing out to the arena where four horses are tied at the front. Their heads slowly swing towards us as we all enter. The energy the children are emitting is immediately picked up and they eye us with interest. Their ears swing back and forth as their heads lift, they watch us walk to the centre of the sand arena. One is a palomino. I can’t help but notice and remember my childhood

books of My Friend Flicka. The other two are brown and the last one is dark, almost brown, almost black with a crazy looking coat, which I'm sure has curls.

Their heads swing back to where they were originally and I notice the palomino cocks his back leg as if bored and ready to fall asleep. I smile at the briefness of their arousal at our presence and the quick acceptance that we're here and are nothing to be concerned about. Meanwhile I am in Border Collie mode as I round up the strays trying to run in different directions.

Kari and Carolyn finish up their short chat with the children and I feel embarrassed that I'm the one showing symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder by not listening to what was said. Carolyn walks up to one of the brown horses and unties the rope to bring it back to us. I hear Kari announcing behind me. "This is Disco."

Both Kari and Carolyn tell us they are going to cover safe practices and procedures. I have to admit I feel a great sense of relief as these animals are large, with large heads, large feet and large teeth. I feel like I'm telling myself the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Now I feel silly. I smirk to myself, it's been a long time since I've let my inner child out. I really do like it.

"Did you know horses have blind spots?" Kari eyes all of the children as she talks to them,

The children are confused and shake their heads as they wonder what she means. I imagine them envisioning invisible spots on horses. My mind is wandering again and I wonder why I entertain myself with these strange thoughts.

"Horses can almost see all the way around themselves. Do you know why?"

Some of the children shake their heads, their interest sparked as they stare at the horse that Carolyn is holding.

“Where are your eyes?”

More confusion as they stare at her with nonsensical expressions.

“Why, right here of course.” Chirps Stephen as he points to his own eyes.

“Yes!” Kari cries. “They’re at the front of your head. “Where are they on the horse?”

The children all turn to look at Disco and I see their hearts are growing just staring at her beautiful soft, quiet disposition and large brown eyes.

“They’re at the side.” Stephen replies as he turns back to Kari.

“Why do you think that is?” Kari continues, her eyes leave Stephen and travel to the others for an answer. No one responds.

“Remember what we talked about in the classroom?”

Blank faces stare back. The excitement of seeing the horses has taken away the prior words.

“Predators and prey, what are they?”

I’m impressed by Kari’s tenacity and patience. These children certainly draw on that but the outcome is worthwhile with them. I know that.

I watch faces scrunch as they think about this and I smile as Stephen throws up his hand to answer.

“We are predators, the horses are prey.”

Kari almost squeals as she says “Yes, well done.” She gives Stephen a broad smile and I see his chest puff up again. This is a good day for him. “As predators we have eyes at the front of our heads, whilst prey have eyes at the side so they can see much more than we can. But...”

The children are agog and stare at her with interest.

“Horses cannot see in two places. Do you know where?”

Heads slowly shake as they listen intently.

“Put your hands where I put mine and tell me what happens?”

Kari’s hands are in front of her face and the children do the same.

“What do you see?” She continues.

Stephen’s response is full of excitement, “I can’t see.”

“That’s right!” Kari drops her hands. “Horses can only see at the sides and not their immediate front. Where else do you think is their blind spot?”

There are more scrunched faces, deep in thought. Heads give soft sways from one side to the other as they’re all flummoxed.

Kari smiles at their effort to try and figure it out. “They can’t see immediately behind them.” Her eyes scan the children once more. “Do you know what that means?”

Stephen is crushing his lips together as words suddenly spill out. "They can't see their poop!"

The children are in uproar and I have to suppress a giggle myself. Carolyn and Kari are laughing almost as much as the children.

Stephen looks very smug by all of the attention and it takes a little while for everyone to calm down.

"HmMMMM!" Kari responds. "Not what I was thinking."

Little bursts of laughter erupt again.

"They cannot see someone standing behind them." Kari's face takes on a grave expression as she continues. "This is why a horse may kick. They see someone beside them and then they're gone. This can cause them to panic." She gives them a chance to digest what's been said. "In the wild horses are hunted by predators. What animals might attack them?"

"Bears!" Stephen shouts out.

"Yes! What else?"

"Cougars!"

Kari's expression becomes very serious as she continues. "Cougars jump onto a horse's hind end at their blind spot." She takes in the grave faces. "So horses are afraid of things walking into their blind spot because it might hurt them."

Nodding heads jiggle like bobbing buoys. Faces have a protective look as they turn to stare at Disco.

Carolyn calls their attention from Disco to herself. "This is why we're going to show you what is safe when you're with a horse and what isn't."

Carolyn shows us where to stand and not to stand when with a horse. Her hand follows the horse's body as she pulls in close around the horse's whole body from one side to the other. Now her hand is off the horse and she is giving a wide distance to the horse's hind end.

Stepping in she shows us the "kill zone". I twitch in horror at the expression and see it is absorbed quickly by the children as they too look on in fear.

How quickly fear passes. Carolyn is leading the horse and I notice the children stepping forward, their hands twitching to hold the rope and lead too. We watch her ask for "halt" with no response from the horse and find out that because she didn't stop walking the horse doesn't either. Her voice is firm with authority as she asks for "halt" and Disco stops this time.

Kari is now telling us how to tell when a horse doesn't feel safe. Tight muscles, raised head, large eyes and nostrils seem to be the main focuses. Although, a stomping foot and flattened ears should make the children be on high alert and drop the rope if they think they're in danger.

"Time to partner with your horse."

Excitedly the children run over to the horses. Horse heads raise and turn to the oncoming momentary rabble. Kari and Carolyn are quickly there dispersing the children away from the horses and telling them to find a partner in the group to work with. Everyone finds a partner except Daisy. Three of the boys have grouped together making her the odd one out.

Daisy's health condition causes her to burp involuntarily. The children are impatient with her because of it. Their lack of empathy, makes them hurtful and

unkind. Her round face shows the pain she tries to hide. Most times she succeeds but today, her glassy eyes and hanging head show she feels this blow right through her heart. Daisy is here because she is bullied, the boys are here because they're bullies. I'm wondering how this will work.

Annoyed, I watch Bobby, Jack and Stephen walk over to Carolyn who is explaining what they are to do at the challenges. They're shown how to hold the rope and leave with Disco slowly following them.

Daisy walks sadly to the last horse. Kari tells her his name is Jordy and that he is special because he has a curly coat whilst the other horses don't. Daisy smiles, finally something just for her. Kari goes through the same process as Carolyn.

Jordy quietly follows Daisy as she walks away to try a challenge on her own. I can't believe how much this hurts me despite the fact that Daisy has pulled herself together. Children can be cruel to each other and this poor girl suffers terribly. She is bullied, laughed at and always left out. Her disorder becomes a joke to the children, even though I try to tell them it is not her fault. Watching her trying to be brave and pull her shoulders back as she walks away is crushing and I have to turn away and move to the two chairs provided for myself and Mrs. Clements to sit and watch.

I have to suppress a laugh as I watch the boys blasting their way through a challenge without reading what they're to do. Kari is there quickly. I catch some of what she's saying, questions to get the boys interacting with her. After listening, they perform the challenges, gaining different experiences to reach the objective. When they do, Kari rewards them with a high five.

I notice Daisy is in her own world, chatting to Jordy as if he is her best friend. I note how relaxed her body is and how comfortable she is with the dark, curly haired horse. In parallel, Jordy is exactly the same. I'm impressed at the bond they already have as they go through the challenges with no problems at all.

The three boys are alone on another challenge. I hear voices being raised at each other as they become frustrated that they can't do it. This time Carolyn steps in, she asks questions and the boys figure things out. As they move on to the next challenge they see Daisy with Jordy.

Disco has slowed down to the point that the boys are almost dragging her. I can see the lines of annoyance in their faces and know they're calling each other out as to who should lead Disco. Jack spins on his heel, I can see him stare at Daisy and Jordy. I know exactly what he's going to do.

With a heavy feeling in my belly I watch him rip the rope out of Daisy's hand and pull Jordy away. I'm too far away to hear the words but I see Daisy's deflated face as he takes Jordy from her and tells Bobby to give her Disco, which he does. Turning Jordy a curl of dust rises from his twisting hoof. With defiance they walk away, smirking at what they think is their triumph. I want to jump off my seat and run toward them to grab Jordy back. Instead, I half raise out of my seat and plonk down again in defeat. I watch Kari and Carolyn in discussion. I know it is regarding Daisy but they don't move. They go back to the other children.

Meanwhile, I watch Daisy sullenly walk away with Disco. She's dragging her feet as Disco obligingly follows, sand fluffs up half covering her footmarks. Disco's hooves step into them as she follows behind her. It's like watching a lamb struggle to get back up after a tumble. Legs wobble slightly as the lamb travels to the moving flock. Poor Daisy, always struggling, always being the black lamb of the flock.

To my surprise I see Disco nuzzle Daisy's hand. The movement is soft, gentle as Disco releases a blow of air through her nostrils. As if taking air in for Daisy and releasing it to encourage relaxation. Did I imagine that? I'm not sure so I keep watching. There again, Disco's soft nose behind Daisy's shoulder as she reads her next challenge. Daisy's hand sits upon the mare's neck and with relief I watch

Daisy's shoulders drop in relaxation. My heart fills at this beautiful exchange of energy and respect.

In an alternate parallel I see the boys are struggling again. Shamefully I feel a sense of *hah! Serves you right!* I look around to make sure no one has seen my expression. No one has. I should keep my emotions in check and be professional but sometimes, it just isn't an option. They look as if they're tugging on a bull as Jordy stands his ground. His feet are so firmly planted in the sand you can't see his hooves and he swings his head as if looking elsewhere pulling Stephen off his feet as he angrily shouts at the horse. I get the feeling the horse did that on purpose and again I am awed at how little strength they need to use to unbalance the small bodies of humans. More struggling on their part ensues as more seconds pass. Carolyn steps in with questions for the boys about their challenge.

In the background I hear Kari's voice vibrate off the metal walls of the arena, "only five more minutes left. Don't worry if you haven't done all of the obstacles. You've all achieved the objectives and that's what counts."

I hear Mrs. Clements move in her chair. I'd completely forgotten she was there, being so engrossed in what went on with Daisy and the three boys. She turns to me and whispers as if we're being spied upon.

"What did you think of the boys taking Daisy's horse?"

I give a *hurrumph* in response. "I wasn't impressed that they did that. However, Daisy came through as the star, doing just as well with Disco."

Mrs. Clements nods in agreement. "Honestly, that poor girl just can't get a break but you're right she did shine with Disco, as she did with Jordy. I nod in agreement.

The program is done for the day as we both rise and look at one another.

“That went rather well.” Continues Mrs. Clements.”

“I agree!” There is surprise in my voice and I feel somewhat embarrassed by it. Quickly I make my way across the arena to the children with Mrs. Clements following. The children have been shown how to tie up their horses and are leaving the arena with Kari and Carolyn.

Back in the classroom the children chat excitedly with Kari and Carolyn. Everyone goes through their experiences of being in teams with the horses. It's interesting to hear what they have to say and I'm surprised at the words they pick to best describe what was most important to them. The interactions from the children are uplifting and positive. This has been a good day.

## The Following Weeks

The following weeks at the Equine Connection Centre are all good experiences. My only beef is with the three boys who take away Daisy's horse every time. I don't say anything. If Kari and Carolyn feel it needs to be left alone, they obviously have their reasons. Daisy always comes through the challenges with success and participates in picking a word for her experiences with positivity.

When the final program comes, the bus load is in a quandary as to whether they're happy to be there, or unhappy at it being their last time.

Daisy is partnered with a lovely palomino called Pass. The two of them whizz through the challenges on their own with Daisy puffing out her chest in happiness at her success.

Again, the three boys go to Daisy to take her horse.

I nearly fall off my chair as Daisy stomps her foot much like the frustrated horses do.

“No!” She yells. “This is my horse!” Her stance is that of determination and her eyes blaze with an intensity I’ve never seen before.

The boys step back in surprise. I have to suppress a laugh as the three of them gape with dropped jaws, unable to move.

Daisy however, has no problem moving off with her horse and goes to the next obstacle. Her head is high and her body emits confidence.

The boys are gobsmacked. I almost wonder if they are going to move again as they stand on the spot for a long time. It’s the longest I have ever seen them stay still.

Mrs. Clements turns to me, grinning. I realize I am doing the same. It isn’t professional but we would be giving each other a high five at this moment if we could.

It’s a moment in life that you want to remember. When you see a big change in one of your students that is surprising in its empowering energy.

We’re in the classroom, benches are squeaking as children squirm and jiggle their bodies in suspense. Children are rising to pick their word of the day. Almost everyone has gone up and explained their reason for picking their word, only one person is left. Daisy stands up and goes to the board. She doesn’t pick up one, she picks up eight words. Carefully, she gives her reasons for each word. My

eyes are massive as I listen to her normally tiny voice explode with confidence as she tells everyone how she feels and what she has learned.

The applause is amazing! All of the children are standing up and giving her accolades for what she has achieved. How proud I feel of my class. Not only has Daisy surpassed herself but the other children have understood what Daisy has done. By stepping out of her bubble and standing up for her self-esteem with confidence and strength. This trip couldn't have ended any better. I look at Kari and Carolyn who are also filled with emotion at what Daisy and the rest of these children have accomplished.



I silently offer kudos to everyone. I marvel in wonder at the success of these programs and the steps in advancement of empathy, confidence, teamwork, respect and so

much more the children are walking away with. So many soft skills to help them in life. Experiential lessons that they have learned from their four legged equine partners.

## Conclusion

The length of time for a process is different for everyone. For Daisy it took weeks of taking a one hour fifteen minute session. However, the result was huge for

Daisy and for the other children. Not only did Daisy walk away with self-esteem and a voice, her companions learned respect and admiration for her. She built her own mission statement through those eight words and what they meant to her and through her inspiration she was recognized for her leadership in controlling what she wanted.

***Kari Fulmek and Carolyn Charles - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Story of Gary - The Bully - Week One

*Adapted to Non-Fiction Narrative by Krystyna Faroe*

So far I've been impressed by the behaviour of the children attending the Equine Connection programs. Usually these children have a difficult time listening and soon lose interest in what is going on. As an Education Assistant I've had the chance to enjoy watching the series of events taking place and languish in the knowledge that the Equine Assisted Learning Facilitators have everything well in hand.

Today with our new group I have to question whether I should intervene with a boy called Gary. I explain his call for attention through disobedience and disruption but our two confident facilitators say they will take care of things, I am to sit and enjoy the progress the children are making.

I know Gary will present a problem which is why I immediately ask where I stood with regards to any actions needed. I am impressed by the leadership of both Kari and Carolyn, even though I doubt Gary will be obliging in any of the challenges.

Of course Gary isn't listening or participating in the challenges and is wandering off in his own world, he takes to humming tunes. With his curly hair bouncing under his helmet, he skips through the sandy arena. I can't help but keep my eyes on him wondering what he might do next. His wandering feet take him to the children, where he scornfully tells them they are doing things wrong.

My anxiety leaves me uncomfortable but I can see the other children are loving being with the horses and pay no heed to his words. Some even stick their noses into their horse's mane breathing in the scent of the outdoors and animal musk.

Everyone is completing their challenges with alacrity and so much personal empowerment that I became lost in their achievements.

By the third week I've given up on watching Gary, he does his own thing and no one takes any notice, not even the horses.

How wonderfully everyone is doing, I feel so much pride in these children that often struggle in so many things they do at school. To see them making headway through the programs leaves my heart full.

Watching Jenny I notice her horse's head suddenly shoot up into the air. I am suddenly fearful for her until I notice all of the horses have their heads high. This isn't a good thing, Kari has told us it is a fear reaction and my full happy heart empties for a glob of cement to take its place. Checking out the children's reactions I see no one is upset or worried. I know they've learned fortitude during these programs but still, these are thousand pound animals with big feet.

I see why all motion has stopped, Gary is waving a stick with a card on the end through the air. His body swaying with the movement, his goal to make as much of a ruckus as possible. His eyes are gleaming with laughter at the response from the horses and an immediate halt to the programs. Dimpling his cheeks with a smile, he swings back and forth with glee.

Turning I look from Kari to Carolyn. Walking towards Kari, Carolyn whispers in her ear. They look at Gary who is still swinging the stick with the card of information on it through the air as if he is singing the national anthem with a flag. Looking at the horses, who are now dropping their heads and concentrating on the children once more, I realize there is no immediate action required. Children are moving on with their challenges and horses have brushed off the hiccup as nothing of importance. Dropping my shoulders I breathe out in relief, there is no danger, everyone is safe.

With surprise I see Kari and Carolyn continue with the programs and not approach Gary to reprimand him. I know the programs are about giving the children power, I realize telling him off would do the opposite. I can't help but watch him in surprise at the facilitators' reactions.

No longer grinning, he lets the moving post flag end drop to the floor. It drops to the sand, embedding itself. Gary is alone, no one is paying him any attention as his pigeon chest drops with a deep sigh. Dropping his eyes to the card and stick he lifts it towards him. Brushing off the sand, he makes sure it is still well attached and takes it back to the place he pulled it from. With great care he places it exactly where it had been, making sure it is sturdy and the area around it is clean and tidy. I feel my jaw drop a little in surprise as I take in a quick breath of air. Carolyn is walking to him. In front of him she takes hold of his sweater and attaches a brightly coloured clothes pin.

I can see he is asking *what's this for?* Even through the hustle of moving horse bodies and children's bodies I hear her say, *this is for having integrity* and very casually she walks away.

Gary's face is comical, the look of shock makes me grin. How marvelous! Instead of being in trouble for his prior actions, he has received a reward for his positive actions. Gary is positively gleaming in joy. His reaction gives me hope for him.

With a happy face he moves to the groups of children. Instead of telling them they are wrong, he encourages them and helps as best he can. With positive body language he works with them. Helping them solve the challenges and enjoying every moment.

## The Following Weeks

During the following weeks, Gary willingly joins in all of the programs with a much



changed attitude and a belief in himself that he has struggled for so long to find. And I? Well I watch the beautiful interchange of

communication between children and horses, as they blossom and grow into amazing new beings filled with empowerment.

## Conclusion

Instead of us responding to the negative behaviour with Gary, we responded to the positive. And showed him that others recognized when positive actions were taken. It was definitely something he was not expecting, but he felt valued and started making choices that were based on positive behaviour. From that day on, he never had the same attitude again. He continually made the choice to respond in a positive manner, and this was all because the horses' bodies told us to step back and let the process happen. It truly is incredible, isn't it?

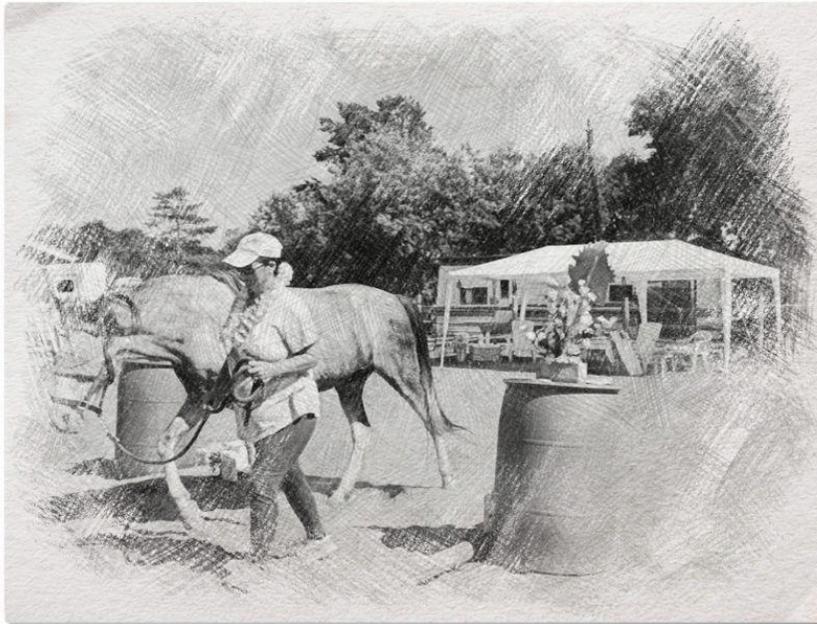
This story is just one of many that just goes to show how powerful Equine Assisted Learning facilitation can be. When we can take every moment as an

opportunity to work with horses to give a human the opportunity to learn skills in their own unique way, they have positive permanent change that fuels a better version of themselves.

***Kari Fulmek and Carolyn Charles - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Chapter Two

### Authentic You Women's Workshops



The Authentic You Women's Workshops were created to help women realize they could be true to themselves. They don't have to put

on a mask and be the person that family, co-workers, friends and anyone else expects them to be.

There is nothing wrong with being you, yet so many women think they have to conform to what is expected of them. We know showing a fake self is detrimental to our own self-esteem and it's exhausting. Why shouldn't we be the people we actually are? Let's think here. Is it due to status, or even keeping the status quo, is it we're afraid? Fear comes into a lot of things and blocks us from being the person we should be and could be. We're not out to say, be difficult. We're saying if you can't be you, what is going on here and how can you change things for the better?

We're out to improve this fabulous being that you are and with your fairy godmother's (horse partner's) help, you will be.

## Fear

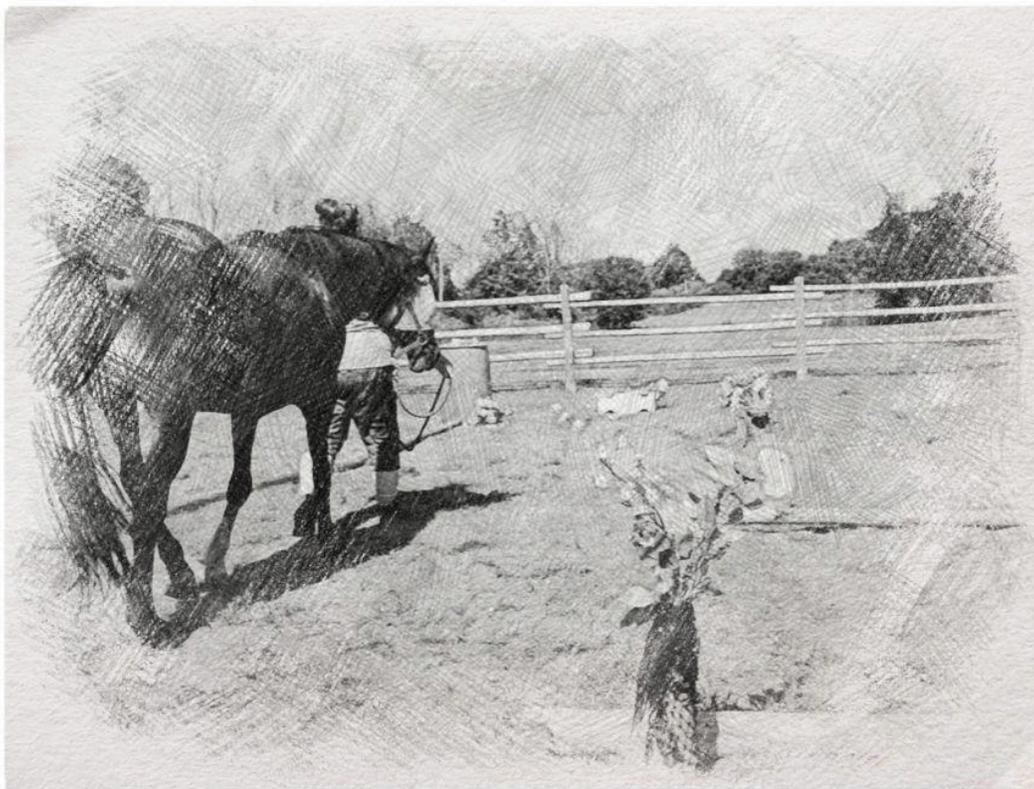
Fear is a difficult emotion to overcome. People can tell you. "There is nothing going to happen to you. Why are you so afraid?"

Does that help? Not one bit. The brain is complex, especially in a human. It's the reason why we're the apex predator. It's why we have sprawling cities, bridges, vehicles and airplanes. We are complicated. The creative side of our brain can create beautiful art, paintings, statues, gardens, buildings, written words, the list goes on. It can also make a coat rack look like a bear. "What?" You ask.

Have you ever sat and looked at a textured floor? After sitting for a while your mind might create pictures on that floor. Suddenly you see faces or animals, birds, it's as if your mind wants to do this to entertain itself. The mind is so powerful and the senses so connected to the body that when it makes that coat rack into a bear, to you, it actually is a bear and you will go to your sympathetic nervous system because your brain has told you to.

I'm not going into this much further. That's for doctors to explain. This book is written in layman's terms so everyone can understand and learn from the experiences.

So, when you tell a scared person *there's nothing to be afraid of*, you're talking to yourself only and not helping them. This brings us to our next client and her fear.



***Krystyna Nelson - Equine Assisted Learning Facilitator, Life, Wellness & Grief Coach - Harmony Farm Equineimity***

## Story of Amanda

*From Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning*

I'm walking through the door wedged between my friends who have brought me here to become an authentic person. It seems a moot point as I am authentic and I've told them with truth in my heart that I am terrified to come to this workshop. I don't need this. I'm honest and I don't want to be here.

When my eyes fall upon the horses, massive beasts with long tails and huge heads that look like they could knock over a 6ft 3" marine I balk even more. My feet are quickly going in the other direction as Daphne grabs my jacket and pulls me back.

"You're going to be okay Amanda. Believe me!"

I'd love to believe her but my sweaty palms and raised hairs are telling me otherwise. A metal claw has hold of my heart and is squeezing it so hard I can hardly breathe. She grabs my hand and pulls me with all her strength as my feet dig in like a paralyzed donkey. I look behind to see the deep grooves I'm leaving behind.

*Oh no! Oh no!* Is all I can think at this moment. Daphne thankfully is dragging me to the middle where two ladies wait expectantly. All the other women are in front of us eager to get on with the workshops. Me, I hide behind Daphne trying to figure out an escape plan. Perhaps I could fake illness and fall writhing to the floor. *No*, they'd call an ambulance and how embarrassing would that be? *Very!*

I look around. The horses are all tied to the wall. They move listlessly. I move around more. I can hear words being said but my mind is overloaded with fear right now that I can't pay attention. I wish I had Dorothy's ruby slippers. I'd be clicking like mad right now.

The conversation has ended and a horse is taken from the wall. I think they're talking about horse safety. Never mind the horse being safe, I'm not. I realize they're actually talking about our safety and my ears are immediately directed to their voices.

I go over what they've said, recollecting signs of nervousness in a horse. What did she say? *Tight muscles, wide nostrils, eyes bulging*, very much like me at this moment. I pay more attention as they finish their display of showing the areas of danger.

To my surprise everyone is racing to get a horse. I've been placed in a group with Daphne, thankfully, who let go of my hand a while back. Probably slid out from the clammy wetness there.

Amidst the group I am directed towards a beast of a creature. This horse is a mountain. Black as onyx and with a head the size of a bucket on a backhoe. Much like one it swings from one side to another. I let out a squeal of alarm. I'm transfixed, staring at this animal whilst others are grabbing brushes and actually touching it.

I hear a voice beside me.

"Are you okay?"

"No!" I sputter. "I'm afraid of dogs, cats, hamsters! Kari I'm afraid of a fly! I can't do this!"

Kari moves closer to me. Her presence is soft and gentle, yet she gives off an energy of strength.

"Why do you think you're afraid of all of these things?"

I puzzle on the question for a moment. I note that I've never had an animal, a pet, even from childhood.

"Because they're unknown to me. I have no personal knowledge of them."

Kari proceeds to ask me more questions and I find I'm engaging in an interesting conversation about my fear. I'm figuring out why I'm afraid. Kari gives me her huge smile and I smile back. My body is less tense and I have a feeling of strength spreading through me.

"Carolyn," she calls. "Can you take Kokanee outside and bring Jordy in?"

I find Jordy is a much better size, he's still big in my mind, anything that could squish you with a slam of their body is not small. His hair looks like tight dreadlocks. Kinda weird looking really. I'm distracted by this for a moment but just a moment.

Daphne hands me a brush to groom him as she works away on his funny looking curly hair. I stare at it as if I've never seen a brush before. It sits firmly in my hand. The bright red bristles look up at me with stiff eyes.

Amanda grabs my hand and places it on Jordy's body. I become rigid but he doesn't move. I'm still staring at the brush when Daphne gives me a jolt to get moving. At arms length I stroke the brush against the wiry hair. I think I have brushed the same spot for 5 minutes now when we're all asked to come into the middle of the arena once again.

I'm nowhere near Jordy now, his dark body is next to Mae who is leading him and Daphne is close to her. I haven't noticed that my brush is still in my hand until I drop my arm and feel its weight. My fingers are glued to it as if it's a talisman. Too late to take it back. I'll keep it with me for solace.

We're moving through the challenges. I'm keeping my distance from the large Jordy, who even though smaller than Kokanee is still a big brute of an animal to me. I'm enjoying the challenges. Daphne and I have already found out that we're analyzers from an earlier study. We stand planning what we should do with Mae as Jordy looks sleepily on.

His closed eyes and relaxed body help me to relax, except when we're in a hot discussion about how we should solve the problem ahead. We hear a voice behind us and turn to see Kari. At this point I think Jordy is actually asleep.

"Jordy doesn't seem to be getting in on this does he?"

We shake our heads, everyone's hair fluttering in confusion.

"Are you including him as part of your team?"

Again hair is flowing in different directions as a slight guilt comes over us all. Kari steps in further to be amongst us. After more questions and answers we realize we have to get on with this and off we go, full of logic and confidence that our plan will work.

We get to the obstacle and once more we are all planning. Our discussion becomes more whether we agree or not than actually getting to a conclusion. Meanwhile Jordy has moved through the obstacle and after standing for a while lays down right in the middle of it.

To say we are stunned is an understatement. Kari approaches us and I feel I'm blushing like a naughty schoolgirl. It looks like we've broken her horse! We're all laughing when she gets here, I'm sure embarrassment has a lot to do with it.

"Hmrrrrrr!" Kari rumbles. "What is going on here with Jordy?"

We get into another conflagration and whilst doing so come to an immediate conclusion.

"What is Jordy saying?" Kari continues.

"That we need to make a bloody decision and take some action!" Daphne responds in a higher pitched voice than normal. We're all laughing once more including Kari.

I look at Jordy, his eyes sleepily opening and closing. Against everything I would normally do I plant myself right beside him, clutching my talisman brush. His body is warm and cozy. His curly hair seems softer now without my fear. He smells earthy, of grass and soil, it's very pleasant. I feel a heightened excitement within me as I look up at all of the shocked faces staring down at me.

"Amanda!" Daphne shakily says, after a moment of just staring at me. Her eyes are reflecting me and Jordy as tears drop to her cheeks. She wipes them away, replacing them with a smile. "I'm so proud of you!"



What a day! I can't believe what I've done and how empowered I feel. My strength seems insurmountable. I laid down with a thousand pound animal and I came out of it alive. I mean, truly

alive! I've never felt this hyped on endorphins in my life. Well done Jordy, you helped me break down a wall of fear that I've had all my life. I am in awe of you!

## Conclusion

It is amazing, when we trust in the teaching of these majestic creatures, there is nothing they can't teach us.

Amanda formed her own answers to her fear. With insight and fortitude she knew what she needed to do. She became a leader for herself, she knew what to do to

improve her confidence and with no pushing from anyone else but herself, did it. Kudos to her for forming conclusions that would work for her and listening to what Jordy was saying to her. Her response to Kari's facilitation became positive rather than the negative that it had started with.

We have insight, we just need the help to find it and that is why these programs were made.

***Kari Fulmek and Carolyn Charles - Equine Connection- The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Authentic You Women's Workshops

*Adapted to Non-Fiction Narrative by Krystyna Faroe*

As an affiliate of Equine Connection I use the same programs. I have found the Authentic You Women's Workshops a great weekend program to help women restore their own self-care schedules.

Our efforts are to remind women:

SHOULDN'T YOU  
BE AT THE TOP OF  
YOUR LIST?



1. kids
2. spouse
3. job
4. pets
5. grocery shopping
6. cleaning the house
7. dishes
8. laundry
9. volunteering
10. YOU

Of course our programs cover many other things too. We help with grief, exhaustion, lack of self-esteem, self-confidence, communication and coping with fear, too many to put down.

Our story below is about fear and learned helplessness. Fear causes us to go into the sympathetic

nervous system in certain situations. In this instance the learned helplessness stems from childhood and because it wasn't overcome often carries into adulthood.

***Krystyna Nelson, Equine Assisted Learning Facilitator, Life, Wellness &***

***Grief Coach - Harmony Farm Equineimity***

## Story of Alice

*Adapted to Non-Fiction Narrative by Krystyna Faroe*

Here I am again with my sister, being her companion to another horse related adventure. Diana's driving and I'm sitting beside her with clammy hands wondering what excitement I'll be in for today.

In the past I've been on trail rides where I've been left behind because I was too scared to kick the horse to move forward. As everyone else continues on the trail, I'm standing still whilst my horse grazes on grass. I'm the one panicking and calling for help.

My fear of horses grew and with it my sister's love for them. I never knew why they scared me so much but everytime my dad said you're going with your sister horse riding, I'd want to shrink and run away. My escape never happened, I'd begrudgingly get into the car and stare out of the window, waiting for the inevitable.

Today, I'm staring out of the window again accepting my fate and trying not to think of huge animals with heads three times the size of mine. I look over at Diana, her thick, grey hair is moving in waves as she excitedly anticipates what's to come. My head sinks further into my shoulders. I return my eyes to the window and watch the blur of traffic beside us as we swiftly soar towards our destination.

When we arrive I slowly pull myself from the car seat. I feel like the seat is sucking me back and wish that it genuinely could. Diana is already making strides out of the parking area as she turns to navigate me to join the rest of the participants. I've never thought of a Women's Spa Day including horses. I doubt that giant feet and massive solid skulls quickly turning and possibly almost knocking you out, could be considered relaxing at all.

A large open sided white tent offers refuge from the sun in a large sand outdoor arena. I offer a quick glance at the women sitting in chairs and filling out their information on sheets attached to clipboards. They all look a similar age, middle aged women, searching for calm. Not likely here. I'm handed a clipboard too and take a seat beside Diana who is fervently filling and signing the papers before her. Obediently I fill out my own.

We are taken through some housekeeping information and safety. I can't help but sigh as when it comes to horses I never feel safe. We're told we'll have further safety instructions with the horses after our yoga session. Hmmmm yoga, I'm not sure how that will go but I'm game to give it a try.

Krystyna didn't warn us we had to hike to the yoga. After climbing the hill I'm struggling a bit for breath as I reach the crest of the hill and my eyes fall upon the amazing scenery before me. If I wasn't already gasping I would have gasped at the view. A beautiful eruption of fields below, etched with trees and the full view of Rice Lake, behind which, are rolling hills. I stop and drink it all in. Yes, this is a serene sense for the soul.

I hear a voice in the distance. "Pick a mat and sit down and relax." I turn my head to see a slim, pretty woman dressed in yoga pants and a loose top. Her voice is soft and welcoming as is her smile. I sit myself next to Diana and we pull in the cool breeze and majestic vista into our core being.

Yoga is amazing. I feel relaxed, perhaps a bit warm from the sun but good all over. We slowly walk down the hill, all of us chill in body and mind from the fresh air and stretching. My body feels great, as does my mind as we go back to our meeting place.

We sit down and leisurely sit back chatting amongst ourselves. This is our fifteen minute break before the horses. I can feel my body tightening already as the minutes pass. Fear is taking over the beautiful feeling that I had carried down the

hill with me. I hate it, this feeling, this lack of control over my brain and body. Why am I so fearful? I look at everyone else as they casually chatter and laugh amongst each other. None of them are afraid. How do I get over this? In fact, how do I get through this?

Krystyna is with us once more. She shows us a chart and gives us a briefing on what is to happen next. We are to complete four challenges with one objective. She lets us know finishing the challenges isn't what is important. It is reaching the objective that is. With a quick head turn she steers her step away from us toward the rest of the arena. She invites us to get up and join the horses.

Feeling twice my normal weight I struggle to get up and follow Diana as she almost skips across the arena. I almost blurt out a laugh when I look at the horses. They're miniature horses. Three of them are tied to the fence. They're not even the size of ponies and I know my eyes must be almost protruding like a cartoon character. I'm smiling. I want to giggle but I control myself.

Another lady approaches us and introduces herself as Fiona, another facilitator. She requests that we all stand together whilst she and Krystyna show us a safety demonstration.

They go through how to lead, stop, where dangerous areas are when standing near a horse. How to tell when they don't feel safe and what signs to look out for to keep ourselves safe. I take some of it in but I'm too busy watching those little legs move and the fluffy mane bounce up and down as she walks. They're so adorable!

Fiona hands us Cracker and what a little Cracker she is! Diana and I are both enamoured with our little four legged friend. We happily brush our horse, her short little body about the size of a Newfoundland dog. It's a quick process sweeping over her little legs and brushing through the mound of mane that almost hides her whole neck. This is wonderful!

The clammy hands are gone, as is the dry mouth and heavy feet. I'm laughing with Diana and Cracker seems to be enjoying our laughter too. I notice everyone else is happily talking away to their human and four legged partners. I feel a huge release as my shoulders flop after a few breaths and I feel like hugging this delightful miniature horse in thanks. She gives me a little bop with her head as if to say, *you're welcome!*

We go into the middle of the arena where we are shown our challenges. Each challenge has an instruction card. I see poles, brightly coloured flowers, orange cones filled with more brightly coloured flowers. If anything, it is pretty.

Diana and I go through the challenges. Little Cracker is a doll, she tries hard for us as we all laugh together at getting things wrong. We get it right and bend over laughing yet again at our seemingly higgledy piggledy methods of achievement. I realize how much I love my sister and how much she is loving all that we're doing. I am glad I am here for her and give her a hug to share how I feel.

The day continues to be lovely. Lunch at a vineyard. A tour of Walton Woods property and several purchases of beautiful goods. We begin the last event of the day which is working with our precious miniature horse again. We've had discussions about life, needs, how we can help ourselves, the outcome of our challenges and how we feel.

A very good day with my lovely sister. We leave with broad smiles. I, more confident around horses (be it much smaller ones than I've met before). Diana feels good at the release of her stresses and learning that she truly is the amazing person she is. I feel better about myself. It's hard not to cast yourself down when you carry fear but today I feel strong and self directed.

## Conclusion



When we're stuck within ourselves it is difficult to communicate to ourselves what is really going on. With others to collaborate with we're able to draw out what is stuck inside.

Questions help us to sink deeper and find conclusions and

answers we didn't realize we had.

***Krystyna Nelson - Equine Assisted Learning Facilitator, Life, Wellness & Grief Coach - Harmony Farm Equineimity***

## Cheryl's Story

Sometimes the best stories don't come from our perspective, but from the perspective of the clients who felt the change within themselves. This is a story that a client sent us and we were so grateful she allowed us to share.

“YOU ARE WELCOME IN MY WORLD, DO NOT FEAR ME. FOR THOUGH I AM GREAT IN SIZE AND STRENGTH, SWIFT AND POWERFUL. I AM OF GENTLE SPIRIT, KIND, COMPASSIONATE AND CARING, AND TO MANY I AM KNOWN AS HEALER”.

Meet DISCO

“Disco is such a strong teacher since he literally will not move until he knows it is right. He has been described as stubborn (I would never be!), but with the right leader, he will follow you to the ends of the earth. He is the man who will show you to go with your gut. To step into the person you are and believe in yourself. He is chatty (sorta like me) and at times will flap his lips all over you to help you out.

Disco wants me to believe in myself, in my gut, and to have confidence in my direction. I showed him my ability to get out of my head and listen to my gut to move forward. AND SO I SHALL DO SO!!

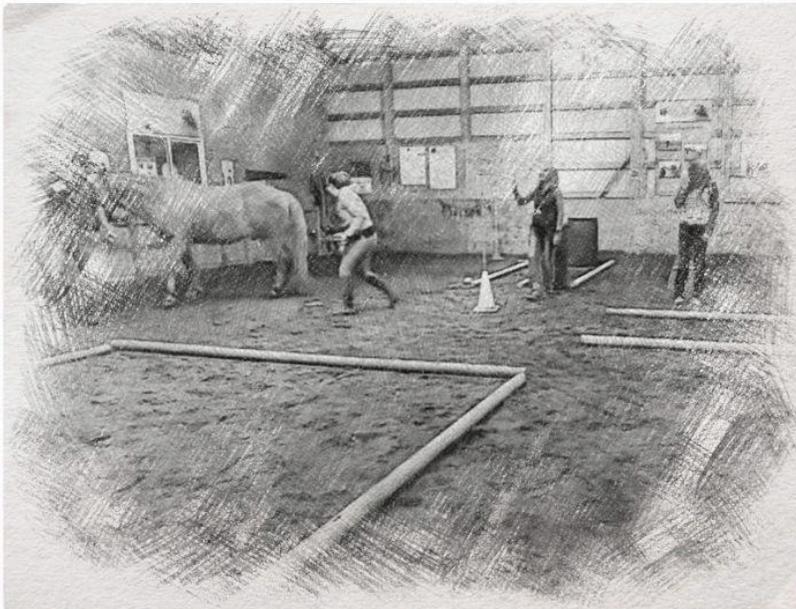
I attended my first “Healing With Horses with Equine Assisted Learning in partnership with OSI-CAN” (Operational Stress Injury for First Responders and Veterans). The intent of this program is to help people avoid the trials and tribulations of what they have gone through. Connection through each other's stories helps us humans to feel inspired to move forward in this short little life.

When I was introduced to Disco in the program, he immediately nudged my gut with his powerful head and almost knocked me down. Then he had the audacity to flap his lips at me!!! My job was to get Disco to walk with me. At first he would

have nothing to do with the way I was trying to pull all 1200lbs of him!!! What he taught me is that I need to relax so he can feel safe with me, not pull the lead on his head, but loosen the lead until there is a lot of slack on the lead. Almost immediately he could sense that I was leading with my gut with confidence and he began walking with me. As you can see, the smile on my face says it all!!! I moved all 1200 lbs of Disco!!!!

You will also notice the stars surrounding us which is a sign that “my stars will some day align and shine bright once I have the confidence to follow whatever direction I will go.

The black butterfly is extremely symbolic to me (black butterfly wing tattoo on my forearm). The meaning of the black butterfly is known for its portrayal of hope for overcoming horrific obstacles, pain, and freedom from emotional distress. Black butterflies are seen as an omen of good luck and are often interpreted as a symbol of freedom or the removal of barriers”. What more can I say! When the program was coming to an end after the weekend, I turned to the facilitators and said “this is my calling and THIS IS WHAT I WILL DO!



***Cheryl***

## Chapter Three

### Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning

#### Building Block Programs

When we talk of change, we know we're approaching a difficult subject. For some adults, change is very hard. Often, they cannot take on a more desirable lifestyle for their health, despite the negative circumstances that keeping their old lifestyle offers. I think that we feel safe with the lifestyle we've chosen and to step away from that is uncomfortable. I realize as adults we can become set in our ways.

In children we have a "motherboard" wanting to absorb knowledge and learn, their "brain chips" enjoy being activated. A psychologist once used the metaphor that the brain is a computer and in reality it isn't that far from it. Data goes in and is stored, what isn't necessary is deleted. However, on the sad side of things trauma stays there generally forever, unless the mental health system achieves success by helping the person delete it.

When children have lived through difficulties, they are often left with trauma. It can leave them shut down, closed off and not wanting to participate in things. Let's not assume that our next story has involved such things but whatever the reason behind these boys not wanting to learn, wasn't a good one.

## Story of Michael and Travis

*From Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning*

I know the boys are coming again today as I rack my brain trying to figure out how I can get them more eager to do the challenges. Children usually love them. Competing and gaining accolades through “well done” and high fives usually has them almost running through each challenge.

For Michael and Travis it's taken several sessions just to get them to participate properly. There's always an excuse as they stare sullenly at the floor. I've collaborated with Carolyn but our successes have been few. At least they accept leading a horse even if they aren't tackling the challenges with any form of verve.

Today, I have chosen a particular horse for them. If leading is all they want to do, they'll have a challenge leading Buddy. Buddy's gift to our two inattentive children, Michael and Travis is, if they don't want to do anything, he won't either.

I tell Carolyn the plan, at first she responds “But Kari. They won't make it through anything at all!” She listens to my reasoning and agrees it is at least worth a try to get some reaction.

I watch Travis and Michael drag their feet through the sandy arena toward Buddy. He stands quietly tied at the edge of the arena with his head low, looking like he's taking a nap. He doesn't even raise his head as the boys walk up alongside him.

Travis undoes the tied lead shank and walks away with Buddy obediently following toward the closest challenge station. Michael reads the station instructions his voice is low with no enthusiasm as his eyes then wander around the arena. Travis follows Michael's eyes strolling across the moving bodies of horses and children. When they return to the instructions, their eyes are as blank as when they started. Michael places the card back onto the clip.

Michael moves forward so Travis follows, Buddy however, does not. Travis looks at Buddy with a quizzical stance. Meanwhile Michael, who has continued walking, stops, when he realizes that Travis and Buddy aren't with him. He strolls back and asks why they're not moving.

Travis tells him why and they both look stumped as they stare at Buddy. Finally, Travis gives the lead shank to Michael and tells him to lead, which Michael does, but only gets two strides in before being stopped by Buddy's inert body. Both boys are again looking around the arena. This time when they've finished scanning everyone, their eyes are no longer blank but curious. Everyone else is going through the challenges with their horses. None of their horses have halted and refused to budge.

Their eyes fall upon each other and onto Buddy whose feet are deep in the sand. Again, they look at each other but now with frustration.

It's time for me to make my move. I saunter over with a smile taking in both boys' faces.

"What's happening here?" I cheerfully ask the sullen boys.

I watch Michael make horizontal lines in the sand with his shoe as he looks down unhappily.

"I'm not sure." His eyes briefly connect with mine and return to the ground.

I turn to Travis who is now making patterns in the sand as well. He gives a hunch of his shoulders.

"Hmmmmmm! Why do you think Buddy doesn't want to move?"

They take a glance at each other and at Buddy.

Travis perks up and responds, "It is because of our attitudes. Our attitudes are so bad that Buddy will not move for us."

“That’s interesting.” I say, as I nod my head in a slow yes as my lips draw together.

Since they knew the answer on what to do, there is no need for me to continue standing there asking anymore questions. I have to let it happen and step away.

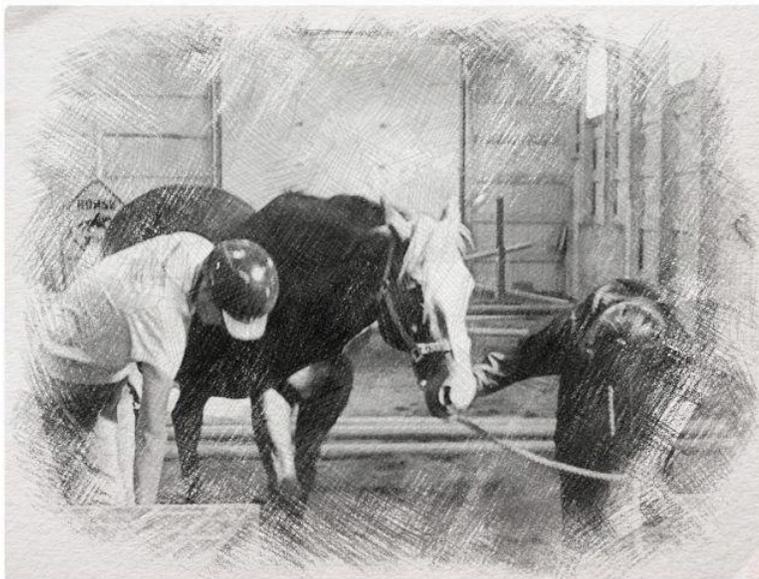
Without a second thought Michael leads buddy. Buddy immediately walks with him to the challenge. Watching the boys step over the wooden pole with Buddy I feel prickles up my spine. The boys understood that their poor attitudes are holding them and Buddy back. They’ve made the choice to change and with it Buddy has become an obliging teammate.

Feeling excited I walk over to them.

“How did you get Buddy to move?”

Without a pause Michael replies, “Kari, I have been listening to you this whole time about how attitude affects everything and we have complete control over it. So, I did what you taught me...I stepped away, took a deep breath and decided I needed to change my attitude. I came back with a changed attitude and Buddy listened to me.”

I look over at Travis and ask what he thinks. He explains that he realized that he has a bad attitude and he’d been choosing not to change it. I give them both a high five and walk away.



With my chest swelling as I take in one of my happiest of breaths, I feel my job is the best in the world.

## Conclusion

Michael and Travis came to our program with no desire to participate or even give the program a try. Their facial expressions and attitudes were clear that they wanted nothing to do with the program or the horses. It is clear in life that having a bad attitude is like a flat tire. If you don't change it, you'll never go anywhere and that is just what Michael and Travis experienced.

Using Buddy – a horse that does not budge if he doesn't understand what is being asked of him and would not move a muscle for them, as the communication within the group was lacking. Therefore, Buddy was unclear as to what they wanted him to do. Michael and Travis' bad attitudes inflicted upon their communication and as a result, the horse responded accordingly.

During the session with Buddy they experienced things differently. Allowing them to have some time to try and work through their troubles, I decided it was time to approach before frustration set in and ask what was going on? Michael and Travis knew exactly what they needed to do, fix their attitude, and magic happened.

Michael and Travis realize we have a choice!

It is a remarkable program because it is so clear that both of these boys understood the importance of their attitudes and how they have choices, and how attitudes and the decisions they make affect everything around you. When Michael & Travis made the choice to change their attitudes, or not, Buddy was in with them. Because they clearly communicated what it was that they were feeling and became the leader within.

***Kari Fulmek and Carolyn Charles - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Insight Into The Programs

The first session that people take when coming to Equine Connection is the Orientation. It is a way for clients to familiarize themselves with the horses and how the horses will “speak” as their teachers.

We had a group of women who came into the program. Some of them were fearful of the horses, others were so excited they could barely contain themselves. We went through the briefing for the course and explained in the arena how the horses *speak* to us through their *bodies*. The women were enthralled. The majesty of these creatures just standing with these women brought them a sense of joy and contentment.

At the end of each session in the arena, we debrief and ask everyone to write in a journal. When the women have left we read what they have said. As we went through the journals as normal thinking that it was a good session but nothing mind blowing, we were surprised to find these comments:

- *“Letting go of a loved one is okay. Energy never dies, if just changes form”*
- *“I felt love and compassion from Disco (the horse) towards myself. It was beautiful to feel that kind of love again. I am so blessed to be here.”*
- *“Today it was as if all my problems went away. The horses took it all from me. Jordy the horse reminded me that I am not alone and I can ask for help. We have each other. That brings me comfort in moving forward.”*

- *“Today Disco taught me that I am a powerful woman by moving an animal that is over 1300 pounds. All I had to do was have my heart in it and believe in myself.”*
- *“I will accept myself because I am beautiful inside and out.”*
- *“I can conquer my fears. My horse moved me through my pain today and helped me see there is life after pain.”*

Sometimes we have no idea what can create a huge impact in a person's life. Never take for granted that the little things, the small gestures, the kind words, the expression of love or a moment with a horse, as they can make a huge impact in someone's life.



***Kari Fulmek - Master  
Instructor - Equine  
Connection - The  
Academy of Equine  
Assisted Learning***

## Communication

Being alone can take many formats. One of them is blocking out others and what they're trying to say.

*Is it because we're afraid of what might be communicated to us?*

*Or is it because we don't want to be called out on the things we are saying and their authenticity?*

*Is it because we're afraid of unkind words and our fragile egos can't take it?*

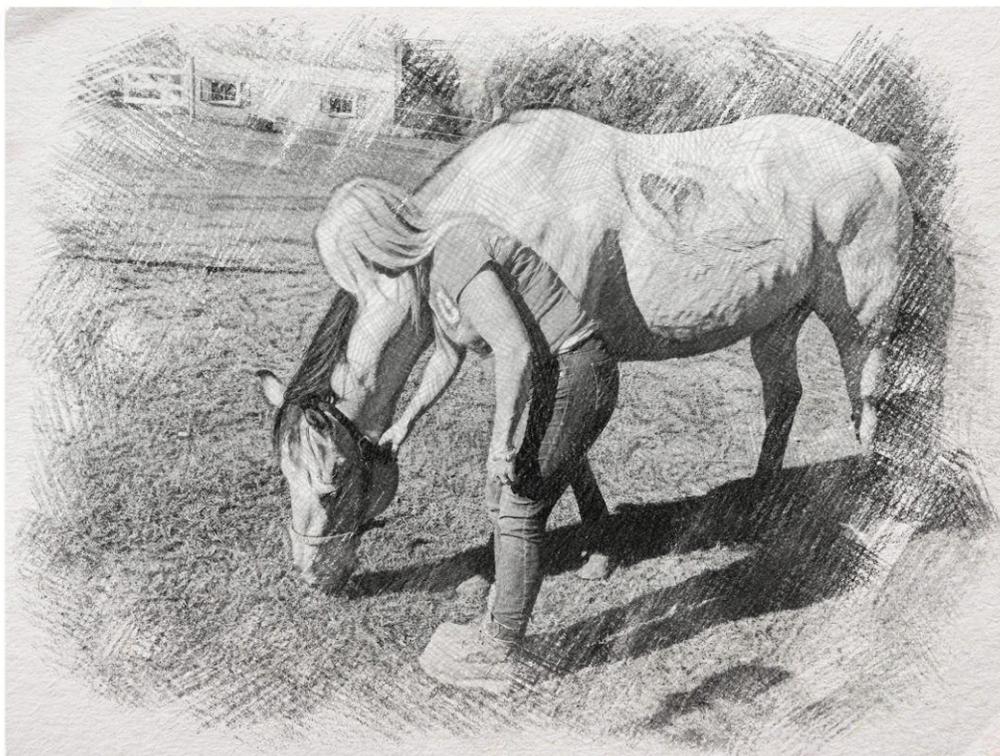
*Or is it because we've found people too cruel and no longer want to subject ourselves to them?*

I can't provide answers but I do know asking questions will often bring enlightenment to us by figuring things out ourselves.

**Communication** is not an easy subject. There are many reasons for closing down. I can admit from my own experiences when I'm no longer coherent due to excess stress and trauma, I can't think. I can't find words simply because I don't know what is going on in my head or my body. I'm misaligned and without methods of realigning I can't tell you what my problem is.

There are many questions to be asked when it comes to *communication*. From a species of high intelligence and a language that is extensive, why can it be so hard? Perhaps the fact that we are complicated and language is complex may have something to do with it. When we go back to simplicity and not over thinking, our lives can become much easier. This section is on programs that highlight the emphasis of **communication**.

***Kari Fulmek and Carolyn Charles - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***



## In 18 years I've Never Heard My Daughter.

(The below story is from **Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning**. It takes place in Texas, USA.)

We have NO idea what backgrounds people have, nor do we know what their day was like when they come to participate in these programs. But...the power of the horse brings out the most incredible things.

When we are confused, or not communicating, the horse reacts through his body language as he can sense that something is off. This is merely for survival alone. As a prey animal they are highly astute and sensitive creatures. If we feel frustrated because someone's not hearing us, or listening, or speaking when they have a thought inside, the horse can sense that something isn't right and will react based on this.

Sometimes the thickness of the air between estranged people can envelope everyone in the room. This is going through my head as I sit and look at mother and daughter sitting beside each other but hardly speaking. I have to admit my own mind is swelling up in this atmosphere of discord, it is so obvious. Still, it's not for me to make judgements despite my feelings. I have a job to do and will do my best to promote a warmer temperature in this room by the end of it.

I brief the program we're about to do and consciously state it's on communication. No goals to finish with regards to challenges other than hitting the objective of communication several times. I take in the mother who looks at me with a disgruntled look as if I'm admonishing her by stressing *communication*. Meanwhile her daughter stares away in another direction where there are no people for her eyes to fall upon and perhaps give away her true feelings.

With a deep breath I draw myself up and smile, everyone needs encouragement and this is what I do with the horses, help people become confident in themselves and realize where their blockages lie.

We're outside in the arena where a beautiful horse we're using stands, back leg cocked as he dozes in the heat of the sun. I feel it cover my face, radiating warmth through the rest of my body that has suddenly become rather cool. It's like a blast of infra-red that seeps into my bones and for once I don't mind how hot it is. She's blessing me with a radiation of blood flowing rejuvenation.

Rio is an impressive fellow. I can imagine a piece of hay sticking out of the side of his mouth with his cocked back leg and see "chill" written all over him. His white body and blotches of black would blend in with holstein cattle, which he'd no doubt love to herd since his breeding is western. He gives the impression of the painted ponies from old cowboy movies. Of course I know this is only me interpreting a horse that is probably none of those things, *a horse is a horse* and can't be anything else. My own whimsy of an impression is just that, a whimsy. His head raises slightly as we approach and his eyes give a glint of interest.

Our ladies know what to do and taking Rio in hand they go to the first obstacle. As they walk through several of the obstacles I notice Rio keeps reacting. I only look at Rio. He's the one I need to observe, not the people. I can see their body language but it isn't for me to come up with reasons why. It's up to them. I do my step in and realize that the mother is telling her daughter what to do all the time. Every question I ask she jumps all over whilst her daughter stands with drooping shoulders, her long straight brown hair covering her expressionless face.

This time when I step in at an obstacle and ask a question which the mother answers, I take it all in. She is as tight as the curls on her head and poor Rio seems too close to convulsions for my comfort. I manage to bring the level of excitement down by reducing my own energy and laying a hand upon Rio who soon settles again.

I continue to ask more questions, the daughter tries to answer but can't get a word in. Rio's head rises once more, he's telling me about the discord between them and the frustration arising within the daughter. Meanwhile her mother has blocked her daughter off and isn't listening. I let her continue her monologue as

she held me in her gaze. Much of what she says is right but she is missing the main thing, team effort, she's cutting out Rio and her daughter from the *communication*.

I thank her for her answers and take in the rigid face of her daughter. She stands in a tight stance, I've seen bronze statues that look more at ease. I purposefully turn away from her mother to be in front of her daughter only. I ask her what she thinks about the questions I just asked. I can see out of the corner of my eye that her mother is taken aback as she believes she has come up with all of the answers. The daughter stumbles for a while to find her voice and then there is an amazing flow of sentences.

I love how the daughter's face suddenly softens, a tumultuous energy of words come forth, all enlightening and re-affirming what Rio has been saying. By the end of her answers her face is smiling and her mother steps beside her and smiles too. There is almost a glint of a tear in her eye as she looks at her daughter in pride.

The rest is what every Equine Assisted Learning facilitator hopes for, connection and communication. Suddenly Rio is family as the three of them swathe through the rest of the obstacles with more clarity and confidence. They're finally a team.

When the outdoor program is done and we've swept Rio from any residual negativity through Reiki, someone leads him away. We go back to sit down and debrief.

What a difference in their faces! Their pleasant, happy expressions are uplifting me. This has to be the best job in the world!

I take them both in and ask what they have walked away with from this session and how they feel. The switch is on as both confide in each other and myself.

“We haven’t spoken to each other in two days.” Mom admits as she warmly sets her eyes upon her daughter. Both of their eyes are swelling with salty tears. She apologizes for their last big blow out. She apologizes for eighteen years of talking at her and never listening or hearing what her daughter had to say, for yelling to be in control but never truly having a conversation.

The stance of her daughter almost makes me want to cry. I may be wiping a few rogue drops from my cheeks. Her shoulders are back and her body is open to her mother’s love. I can see she is very moved by her mother’s words.



“It’s all I’ve ever wanted mom.”

Just for you to listen to me.

“That’s all I want, to be able to talk to you.”

It is a moment that should be private and I feel like I need to throw my hook elsewhere but at

the same time I am drawn to this beautiful display of authenticity and grateful to be here and see the huge hurdle they have overcome.

## Conclusion

When the lines of communication are no longer open we can find one person to be over eloquent and the other shut down because their words are not listened to. Talking over another person can become a habit for some people, who often don’t realize they’re doing it. Sometimes it takes a third person to make them

aware they need to be quiet and listen. In this case Rio was the third in the group to help the flow of communication.

***Kari Fulmek and Carolyn Charles - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Hearts for Joy

Hearts 4 Joy is a volunteer group for Downs Syndrome young adults, they have a lead member who organizes events and helps them create products to sell. This helps keep these wonderful youths happy and busy.

When they came to Harmony Farm Rice Lake, their entourage included: volunteers and parents. They all wore “ Hearts 4 Joy” t-shirts which gave them a bonding vibe between them. There’s something about wearing the same shirt that offers unity to a group.

Marley and Cotton were my horses for the day. We were offering some simple challenges after our initial orientation. I found the group lively and eager to learn. A great atmosphere to be in for sure. There was one young man who struggled to find enthusiasm. I didn’t push him, it was his choice to join in or not. I am happy to say he did!



## Let's Do this!

What a bustling of movement we have. People overflowing in all directions. Eager hands seeking a horse to lead and voice laughing together with the warmness of a glowing fire. Wow! This felt amazing!

"Let's try some challenges shall we?" I scanned the group of Downs Syndrome adults and the volunteers.

Parents stood behind the fence smiling and nodding to their children who were enthusiastically brushing the horses. Heads flew up at the thought of taking on a challenge and I had to carefully pick teams to work with each horse.

I'd never seen Marley so calm, usually he would show some impatience but today he was chill as if he'd just rolled out of bed. Cotton, who was always good

for everyone even though she'd sometimes rather be out in the field, was walking with an exuberance I hadn't seen in a long time.

As we took on the first challenge, I took in the smiling face beside me. How could I not shine bright with such a wonderful authentic person to work with? My heart was filled with, well, joy. Hearts 4 Joy, just what was on their t-shirts was in my heart too!

As he whizzed through the challenge with ease. I could swear Cotton was smiling. I had never seen this mare so relaxed, her whole demeanour was one of comfort and calm. Serenity was here, right now.

Most of the group became involved in the challenges. I was careful to keep watch so I could step in and ask questions. But, there were no opportunities for step-ins. When you have truly authentic people acting in the moment. The horses have safety, they have calm and there's no reason to react. This was the first time I was not needed!

The session went by so fast that I didn't notice the amount of time that had passed. What I did notice was how I felt. I felt great! I was flying high on the joy of life. Being with people that were in the here and now. People who didn't think of the past nor the future, they stepped up to where they were in that second.

I've never had a session like it since. I wish I had because it proved to be one of the most fulfilling days of my life. Not just for the Downs Syndrome adults but for the parents who exclaimed their happiness of the children being involved in the session. Gratitude is an amazing thing. When they expressed their appreciation it not only filled me with contentment, it filled them with joy too.

Later, I went out into the field with the horses. I took a video of myself discussing my morning and how good I felt after. "Flying high", I think was what I said. I'd sure like to feel that again.



## Conclusion

Equine Assisted Learning has a lot to do with living in the moment. Horses don't dwell on the past or the future. Which is why they help us to come to terms with being in a place totally. Not drifting off to what happened yesterday or what plans we have for tomorrow, but being here now. The Downs Syndrome young adults were like the horses very much in the here and now. So consequently the horses responded to them in a relaxed state as there were no internal clashes. Their heads and hearts were in sync.

We're living in a time of make it or fake it. Which only works to a certain extent. Authenticity has become almost a fad to some people. It's "the it word" for now but it should be the word for always. When we live an authentic life we're true to ourselves and in the end, it is ourselves that we compare ourselves with. Are we a better person now than we were? How can we improve ourselves so we can think we are worthy? We can't compare our worth to that of someone else. We can only move forward to the best of our ability to feel our lives are worthwhile.

Like the Downs Syndrome young adults, we can live here and now, not carrying regrets, not thinking things should be different, but living with what we have, in a way that is fulfilling to us at that time.

***Krystyna Nelson - Equine Assisted Learning Facilitator, Life, Wellness & Grief Coach - Harmony Farm Equineimity***

## Rancho Encino

### Unleashing Your Inner Confidence

*“Confidence is not about knowing all the answers, but about having faith in one’s abilities to find solutions. In leadership, confidence is the beacon that guides others through uncertainty, and the unwavering belief that together, we can overcome any challenge and achieve greatness.” — Simon Sinek*

Picture a classroom unlike any other, where horses play the role of teachers and students are challenged to lead them. In one of our recent equine-assisted learning classes, three students had the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership by leading a horse and stopping it at designated intervals. It may sound simple to lead a horse, but that is not always the case. You can’t force a 1200-pound animal to follow you if he doesn’t want to.

#### **The Struggles of the First Two Students:**

As the first two students took their turns, they encountered unexpected challenges.

The horse seemed reluctant to follow their lead, causing frustration and a bit of confusion.

The first student had successfully done this exercise in another class. Why did this horse hesitate today?

The second student was new to the class and expressed that he had anxiety about leading the horse. Did confidence play a part in how the horse viewed him as a leader?

Despite their efforts, the horse required assistance from others coaxing it to comply with their directions. It was a humbling experience, but one that held valuable lessons.

### **The Confidence of the Third Student:**

Enter our hero, the third student.

This student approached the horse with an air of confidence, exuding a quiet determination.

Her determination and confidence were interesting as she hesitated to participate initially and generally is very soft-spoken.

She looked forward and with intention, began to walk.

The horse immediately responded almost magically, willingly following the student's lead.

It was a moment of triumph and a testament to the power of confidence and self-assuredness.

### **Translating to Real Life:**

Let's reflect on how this story translates into real-life leadership situations.

Imagine you're faced with leading a team through a challenging project.

Here's how the equine wisdom can guide you to success:

In any leadership role, confidence is key.

When you believe in yourself and your abilities, others are more likely to trust and follow you.

Confidence is contagious, and it inspires those around you to rise to the occasion.

Moreover, horses, much like people, can sense confidence. They respond to leaders who project a sense of certainty and self-assurance.

### **Cultivating Confidence and Leadership Magic:**

To cultivate confidence and unlock your leadership magic, consider the following:

#### a) Self-Reflection:

Take the time to understand your strengths and weaknesses.

Embrace your unique qualities and acknowledge your achievements.

Recognizing your own worth will naturally boost your confidence.

#### b) Preparation:

The third student confidently approached the horse because she had the opportunity to observe the others and adjust her plan.

Thorough preparation can fuel your self-assurance.

Know your project inside out, anticipate challenges, and be well-equipped to lead your team through any obstacles.

#### c) Mindset:

Adopt a growth mindset.

Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth, rather than fearing failure.

Trust in your ability to adapt and find solutions, knowing that leadership is a journey of continuous learning.

Remember that confidence is the secret ingredient that unlocks leadership magic.

Learn from the wisdom of horses and approach your leadership role with unwavering self-assurance.

Believe in yourself, embrace challenges with grace, and inspire others to follow your lead.

Embodying confidence creates an environment where teams flourish and achieve remarkable results.

Embrace the lessons from our equine teachers, and let your leadership journey be filled with growth, success, and moments of pure magic.

Wishing you an empowering and confident leadership adventure!



***Angela Cardenas - Rancho Encino - Texas***

## Holly's Story

*(The below story is from **Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning**.)*

*"Never give up on someone with a mental illness. When "I" is replaced by "we," illness becomes wellness." - Shannon L. Alder.*

It is very important to ensure that those who feel this way, find comfort and happiness in something. Through the powerful teachings of the horse, it is possible. Holly had always faced many mental health issues which resulted in her abusing substances and not being able to truly be herself. Holly's childhood life hadn't always been the easiest and as a result, she experienced many drastic life changes and had troubles finding true happiness in anything she would do.

A few years ago, while she was still in school and after a bit of convincing, she decided to come and give an Equine Assisted Learning program a try. She, of course, was very scared, as this was the first time she had been around a horse, and they're intimidating if you've never been around them before. She was also extremely skeptical of what she was getting herself into. But, with large amounts of courage, she faced through her fears and came anyway, as she truly did want to help herself to get past her addictions and struggles.

### First Day

I'm in the field with Holly. I'm not sure why I'm taking a different approach today. I've never let our clients choose their horse. We've always brought them in ourselves and had them ready in the arena. Holly's different, she needs to have this choice, the sense of *this is her horse that she picked*.

I can see she's hesitant, understandably, she has no knowledge of how to be around them. Instead she did something that surprised me, she waited. JR, one of our special horses, was the first to greet her. I started back a little. JR never

went to anyone, not even when we wanted to catch her, she was always aloof and made us work for it. I knew JR saw something in Holly that she could help with. It still surprises me how much horses want to help people. It's as if the tension they sense has to be neutralized and brought to calm like they are in a herd.

My surprise was how they quickly connected. As if they silently were saying, *hey I understand you and I'm here for you, let's be friends*. I walked with them out of the field, my heart and mind crazily going over what had happened. My heart knew exactly but my brain hadn't quite grasped it yet.

## Following Sessions

The programs were going very well. Holly came one day each week, went through the sessions with JR and enjoyed each one. Her progress was wonderful and I think JR and myself were both proud of her and the steps she was taking.

## Something's wrong

What happened before that day I'm not sure. All I know is Holly was not herself and JR and I knew it. Her energy was different and the feeling I received from her confused me. She wasn't the same. Her response was *I have a lot going on*.

I always talk about the horse in sessions, today was no different. We talked about how the horse communicates with us and went through our usual process. Holly seemed a bit more like herself so I trucked on with the session. I'm not a therapist so it is never in my approach to ask about anyone's personal life.

JR knew something was different. She sensed the change in Holly and would not respond to her guidance as usual. To my surprise JR started bobbing her head up and down. A sure sign that things are not okay. I'd never seen her do this before and had to take a step back to regain my thoughts.

Holly was upset, understandably, her lovely kind horse was not responding to her as she normally did. I could sense Holly's frustration. Her face was taut much like JR. I didn't know what was happening and I had to find out.

## Why?

Later in the day I phoned my good friend Eppie. I was still concerned about JR's reaction and as a constant seeker of knowledge which as a facilitator we should all do. I explained to Eppie what had happened and asked why would JR do this? Eppie explained that JR was releasing all of the negative energy that Holly had. A reaction they extend when there is imbalance in the herd. The herd always needs balance for safety, balance is vital to survival. JR was taking Holly's energy, releasing it and grounding her.

## Let's try again

The following program day came up and Holly appeared with a more open expression.

"I'm struggling with my life." Her head dropped a little into her shoulders as she made the statement as if the load was suddenly getting heavier. "There's been a significant change." Her eyes averted from mine and I allowed her her space and privacy.

We went through the program. Holly's feet may have dragged a little but her spirit was there to keep going. I know that because JR was fighting for it with her. After the program she opened up to me again with what I felt was an inspirational view of her life.

"JR has shown me another world. She's taken me away from all of the troubling circumstances in my life." Holly tilted her head slightly looking down to the ground.

“She has been so impactful through these sessions with me that I am stronger. I have been able to persevere when times have become tough.” Her eyes glistened, I could see the solidarity there that she had with JR.

“I’ve kept in my mind that I’d soon be here with JR and would feel her strength enter me to keep moving forward. She’s my friend and I am grateful for her guidance.” Her head turned as if JR was there with us and she let out a sigh of release at the thought of her.

I almost lost my self-control, my own eyes were starting to brim but instead I gave a big smile and thanked her for telling me this and how much it meant to me too.



There’s always been a strong connection between Holly and JR. It is a heart connection that can never be broken.

## Conclusion

The experience resulted in a strong connection that Holly still holds with JR. They are very close in their hearts. JR was able to change Holly's life and help her build it back up again. Holly went on to represent those who are bullied and is continuously moving forward in an impactful way. She has been able to build up her self worth and self-esteem.

***Kari Fulmek - Master Instructor - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Sandy's Story

*(The below story is from **Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning**.)*

“Tough times never last but tough people do.” - Robert H. Schuller.

Throughout this program, I have seen first hand that this is inevitably true, one person will gain your attention more than the others. One person that sticks out is a young girl named Sandy. She came to our program so cut up on her arms and legs and with the attitude that she was tough and nothing was going to change that. Sandy thought this program was stupid but little did she know; this program was going to be a turning point in her life.

About the 2nd or 3rd program, she started really connecting with a horse named Pepper. He was one of the most special horses in his personality and we were so blessed that he came into our lives. He was a champion in cattle penning in Canada and his grandpa was #1 champion in Canada. Pepper wrecked his knee and could no longer compete but he still had so much purpose left. We only got to have him in our lives for 1 1/2 years but to this day we still believe that he actually came for Sandy and not us per se. Usually in our programs we like to change up the teachers, the horses but this was not the case for Sandy. From the moment she started to work with Pepper, her life began to change.

Pepper would noticeably use his muzzle on her and she would laugh and laugh. She absolutely loved it! Usually when a horse would do this, we would step in and help the kids to understand how to show a horse you need space. However, this was not the case for Sandy. It was a different situation and we knew we needed to let it happen. From that moment on, they had a really strong connection.

On one of her visits to the programs she wrote in her journal, “How am I ever going to make it in this life without you, Kari, Carolyn and Pepper. You are all so

important to me in my life and how I feel about myself.”

At the end of the program, Pepper hugged her like no other. He wrapped her up, and literally bear hugged her. Nose to his stomach with Sandy in his hug. It was something I had never seen before. I had to force back the tears because I knew it was her moment and I did not want to take anything away from that.

In all my years working, I have never seen another bear hug like I did that day. This program changed her forever. Even in her journal she had written “My word I picked today was (focus) because I am deciding what I want to do after treatment. I will admit I’m scared to leave, you all have been positive for me. Thank you.”



To see the way we are helping people overcome obstacles and find themselves is so rewarding.

**Kari Fulmek  
and Carolyn  
Charles -**

***Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Calgary Board of Education

With all the negativity and craziness that we have had to deal with in the past. Here is a moment to spread some sunshine with an “uplifting” story that we experienced during our many years of this business.

To begin this story I would like to give some background information to help set the scene.

We have been blessed with a master contact with the Calgary Board of Education, which means that we quite often get to see beautiful little humans come to take our programs.

## Taylor's Story

*(The below story is from **Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning.**)*

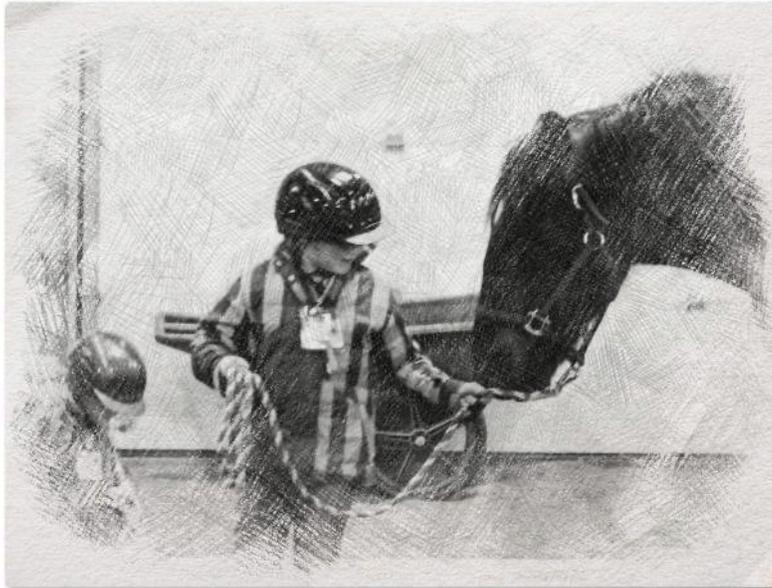
When they first arrive at our facility we always have a briefing where we introduce who we are and what we are doing today, but we also take a moment to talk about how we will have a horse as our teacher.

Well, one time we had this little guy, who was very small, come to one of our programs. It was during the briefing that I finished the introductions and I got to the part where I tell the kids that the horse will be our teacher today.

Taylor immediately jumps out of his seat, slaps his leg and proudly exclaims “ I have always wanted to have an animal as a teacher!”

As you can imagine the kids and the teachers thought this was hilarious, but that didn't phase this little man, one iota!

In fact, at the end of the program, he came rushing up to my partner Carolyn and me and boldly asked *“What will it take for us to come back here again? I can get all the other kids and teachers ready to go but I want to come back here again!”*



## Conclusion

Out of The Mouths of Babes! Even though his stature might have been small, this little guy had big priorities and he wasn't letting anyone take that

away from him!

***Kari Fulmek - Master Instructor- Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Chapter Four

### Building Men Workshop

#### Men's Addiction Recovery Program

We work with you, wherever you are in your recovery process.

It is never too late to start building a fulfilling, purpose-driven life. No matter where you're at in your recovery, we will work with you to help make real and sustainable life changes. No matter what you have been through, we promise you won't be met with judgement or condemnation. Our program is designed to help you become the person you want to be. The journey toward a better path is possible when you have support around you.

#### What to Expect

The process starts with an application. We offer walk-in interviews every Tuesday and Thursday from 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM. If you prefer, you can apply using the form below instead. Once the process is complete, and your application is accepted, you'll move into our Macleod Trail building, where you'll live full-time for seven-weeks. Once you have completed your seven-week program, you are welcome to continue living at the Calgary Dream Centre under our Transitional Housing Program, giving you the opportunity to strengthen your recovery.

A successful recovery strategy includes a holistic approach that addresses the mind, body, and spirit. While here, you will participate in group classes where you will learn about mindfulness, distress tolerance, interpersonal effectiveness, emotional regulation, relapse prevention, and spiritual foundations.

In addition to this you will be paired with a recovery-oriented Case Manager who will work with you to create a unique plan driven by individualized care through one-on-one meetings, and group activities that can include recovery meetings, fitness, equine assisted learning\*, and a woodworking skills program.

\*\*Equine assisted learning is a unique experience with horses that encourages growth, confidence, and self-discovery. Offered through Equine Connection, this program teaches mindfulness, helps participants release stress and tension, and creates a peaceful environment for reflection.\*\*

Recovery isn't just about what you're not doing. It's about incorporating new habits and passions into your life that provide connection and structure. When we enter a healthy community, we become healthy as well. Nobody can tell you how to change, but we can show you a different way, and you might just realize it's the thing you have been looking for all along.

Here, you will find acceptance and understanding that will allow you to heal through love and self-compassion.



***Equine Connection - The  
Academy of Equine Assisted  
Learning & The Dream Center***

## The Power Within Us

### When Men Meet Horses

From Calgary Dream Center we regularly get new men coming into the programs. They run for a week. Which means we have sessions 52 weeks of the year. We are always impressed with the changes in the men and below is one such change that we still hold dear.

We have two 18 year olds, which, you know, when you're a parent, you just want to bring them in but you still want to give them wings to be able to fly on their own. The one 18 year old, he's been here now for a second round, which is cool. And even with what was happening with him, he was with a new guy who had come into the Dream Centre.

He goes, there's my guy. To the new guy. That's my boy! I get to be with my boy again. And I'm going to show the new guy how to do it. Well, this horse, you know, isn't moving whatsoever.

So I step in. I say, *so what's changed for you?*

He says, *I don't know. He's my boy. I don't understand what's happening*

His pal who is with him says, *well, you're really cocky.*

And I say, *cocky. So is that what changed for you?*

And he goes, *well, it's because I'm confident.*

And the guy says, *no, you're cocky. Your ego is totally in this picture.*

I'm thinking like, *oh, ego, here we go.*

Because horses don't have egos. So he had to go to a place which is important in life because you can't carry these egos around with you. It's true confidence in leadership versus the one that we want people to see. The persona.

Oh my goodness this was so precious. So they're leaving but he comes back in and he looks at me and he says *thank you so much. Like you will never understand I was shaking. I was so nervous. I have no trust in humans. What those horses gave to me and you guys is so much.*

I say, *oh my gosh, like I want to hug you.*

And he walked right into my arms, this is a child to me. He walked right in and gave me the biggest hug.

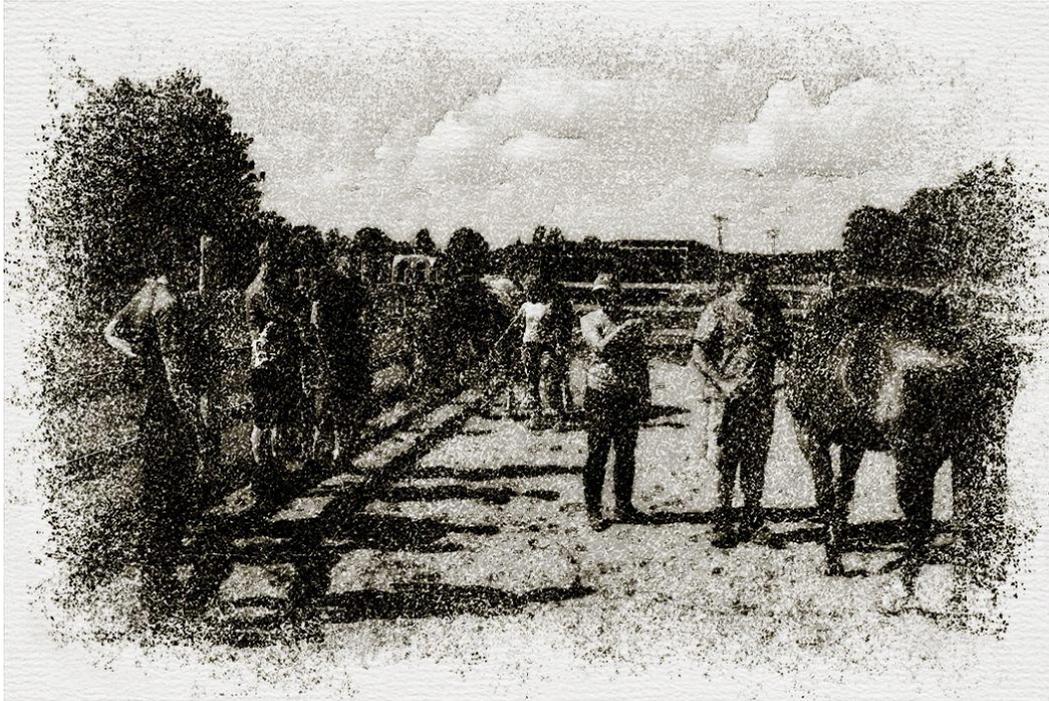
He says, *this is going to help me for my whole week in recovery at the Dream Centre.*

I just can't believe how powerful it was. It was surreal in so many different ways, but it's so real, you know what I mean? And you get, you know, you get a little buzz of happiness and everything after every program because it works.

Most programs, sometimes you're like, well, that was busy. But you got the feeling, you were flying so high after this program. Like the feelings that we got from it were just phenomenal. And when we say *it fills your cup* and that kind of thing, we really do mean this.

It has been a week after this and you can still see how much this has affected us. And we will remember this for our entire lives. Just like we know he will too. All of them will remember this piece. And that's just the power that horses have. I don't

know too many other things, you know, like this is a life event for these people and we've got to be a part of it. I know it's such a privilege. So beautiful.



***Kari Fulmek - Master Instructor- Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Ray's Story

This is our experience with the Calgary Dream Center guys. How do these programs work? I know you've heard some of this before but we always run orientation. Orientation is using the objective of knowledge. We're helping our clients who come in to have the knowledge of why we work with horses. Why them and not other animals? So it's very powerful. We actually have many people who cry during the orientation. When they're with a horse they're crying because they feel, just like horses.

Horses are the most intuitive of all beings. Our clients feel something that connects to them when they hear the story of why we work with horses and the horse's way, how a horse thinks, how a horse actually works. We're not putting human ideas or thoughts onto them. We do not anthropomorphize horses.

How things usually work is we're about probably 20 minutes in a classroom setting. So we're introducing the objective. Then we take everyone out and we do a *woah and safety demo* on how the horse actually talks to you, because you don't know how the teacher is going to teach. You don't know how the horse can talk back to you and how the horse's body language is communicating. So we go through all of the process and then of course, we get lots of interaction because people want to know all kinds of things.

We have one and a half hours max that we run the program. You're not working with horses like every day, we work twice a week working with our organizations. Carolyn puts them into teams. We do a little breathing exercise. We introduce who our horses are, the teachers and what they're great at teaching. And then away they go. They just go to groom, get to know the horse, move the horse a little, move the horse like the gas pedal and the brakes sort of idea. But that's it. It's very, very simple on the very first program.

How this program rolled is when they came in, it was right off the bat, a bit of a different vibe in the room, and you can always feel it. They sat down. There were a lot of crossed arms. There were a lot of challenging questions. About what we were saying and how they were different from dogs or other such things like that, but more so questions on thinking it was BS. Oh yeah. No, they were very clear. Sometimes a little bit more combative too. Like, *I'm going to prove to you that what you're saying is all fluff*. But of course, they never could because it didn't matter what came out. We have our research and our evidence. We know what we're talking about. So at this point, we know in our heads, okay, this is how it's going to be.

We give the information because we have to give them that knowledge piece. We'll do our demos and all of these pieces. But we know at this point it's going to be up to the horses, because the horses are always the proof of the pudding. They are always the ones who help bring it all together and make them realize that we're not liars. But I think a big part of this group, too, is that there's a lot of people in there that felt judged already, not necessarily by us, but in life.

It wasn't until at the very end of the briefing that we said horses cannot judge. It was interesting to see how the dynamics changed just a little bit then. We go out and do the whoa and safety, still talking about the horses, still answering the challenging questions.

We had seven guys there. The Dream Center comes once a week. It's 52 weeks a year. That's how it rolls, so they're always coming in. They're going through their own stuff. So they have not only to build knowledge by themselves and build the knowledge with the horse, you also have another human, because we do want to still build that connection with humans as well. That's a big part of what we do. So we put them into teams but we had one extra horse brought in. So Kari, (and we usually wouldn't even do this). We would usually just let a horse out. But Kari says, *is there anyone that wants to go on their own now?*

Oddly enough, the one fella that was definitely not feeling it at the beginning. Says, *yeah*, right away, he wants to go on his own. I think that was a gut feeling, though, because being a facilitator, we are intuitive. I'm not saying just Caroline and myself are intuitive. We all have the intuitive ability like a horse. But even as we were getting them off into their teams, it's like something hit me and I was actually thinking, this guy needs to be on his own. I didn't know if it was going to work that way because we don't assign the people to the horses, but it was very cool.

So he says he's going to go on his own. He's going to go with Kokanee. Now, Kokanee is our big black Hanoverian thoroughbred. He is a big dude and his teaching is *ambitious*.

Now Kokanee knows he's big. He knows he can just walk away whether you're holding the lead rope or not. And he teaches very well and very strongly. We will see if he is a confident teacher to this guy. It was very interesting.

As this guy walked up to Kokanee, we untied him so he has the ability to move around if he needs to. We always untie horses because then it gives them an exit, which again creates that safety so that horses can tell you where they're at, what they're feeling with those clients.

It was interesting with Kokanee as he gets itchy, he gets lots of bug bites this time of year and he is allergic to them. Normally he wants his head scratched or something scratched right away.

The first thing he did was bring his rump and plant the side of his hip right on this guy. Leaning into him and started doing this stuff with his mouth. He needed to talk. He needed to release something. He needed to move or whatever it was.

So this guy's just standing there with his arm on Kokanee's hip, and Kokanee's head is by me. He is trying to talk. *Let me talk.* I need to help. I need to be released. I need to do something.

The muzzle is just going wild all over the place. And it wasn't for scratches. It wasn't like he needed to help. This went on for quite some time where he was just desperate to get it all out. Then the yawning started. Yawn, yawn. Yawn. Yawn, yawn. Well, in the matter of time that it took, maybe five minutes. This is all going on.

This guy is a tough looking dude, we've learned not to judge people by what they look like. And he had mentioned he had spent a lot of his life in jail and he'd gone through a lot.

He wasn't shy about it. *I've been in prison for most of my life.* You've got the teardrop and the tats. It would be easy to judge this person. But they're coming here because they want to learn. You actually try to be like a horse and you really work hard at being human but not to judge anyone else because we never walked in their shoes. And I'm going to make a judgment about the fact that he made the choice to do something better for his life, which a lot of people don't ever do in the first place. So we're always very open with whoever comes.

But this guy turned into a big old marshmallow with Kokanee and I think it took all of five minutes for him to fall in love. All of a sudden it was a completely different atmosphere in that arena for him and Kokanee working together.

I loved watching that beginning part, he was touched by this, that Kokanee wanted him to be at his hip at first. And ground, ground, ground, grounding nonstop. It was very cool.

Just Carolyn and him, because big things were happening with Kokanee and that client. So my goodness, the other three teams were busy with their challenges.

We always have a counselor or leader there as well so they're not alone, as I'm watching too.

Oh my gosh. Again this is 15 minutes. But what came out of it is so profound because they're achieving the goal. Everyone's safe. The horses are safe, the humans are safe. But the humans are having to make changes quickly, just like we had taught them in the briefing part and doing well.

So the orientation, the knowledge we come back in with, for the debrief in our programs is always, to me, the most spectacular place because you come in with things like these magical moments. Lots of people do have experiences because they're working on their life. It's hard stuff for them. So they come, they show up and some don't really want to be there. Then they go out to the challenges with the horses and afterwards it's hands in the air. Like, that's all I can explain how it always looks each and every time. Oh my gosh!

So they picked the words. Phenomenal words. Yeah! Phenomenal words. These seven men openly express what happened to them with their magnificent teachers. Now it's mind blowing, just listening to what it is that they are saying.

We have them write in their journals a reflection of what it is that happened for them. So oh my gosh, it's amazing! Even after the fact, we do all of this talking and these guys are just being so open. It's, I don't know, it was like the safest place on earth to be. There was something so powerful in what those horses brought to the table.

And the horses were still in the arena but everybody gathered around in the classroom to hear each other express, and even how they paralleled what it meant for each other. They helped each other out with that piece. That's just like you said before but you know when you were saying this, that's exactly what the horse taught you. It was very cool to see how they literally did help each other through how this is going to apply to their lives and how they can take this

information. Now they're maybe telling them that they saw something within that person, that they never saw before and the horse saw it too.

So now they have to believe it, right? It was really cool how they all rolled through. So I think we'll read a couple of these journals. Yeah, we're going to read you a couple and we're saving the very last one, the one who is more combative, he wasn't sure about us, didn't really believe any of the stuff we were saying. But things happened to him and he needed to share it with us. They call each other the Bros because it's a men's group. And then the hugs and stuff after, amazing.

So here are just a couple to share.

One fellow wrote:

*I feel just how privileged I am to be here working with the horses, knowing I am privileged to be here and in recovery and to be here at all.*

*Another one said; I learned that I need to be more present in the moment with who I am around, so that I can listen and I can actually help more. Each moment I will try to focus on the conversation that I'm in or the actions happening around me.*

*Another one was to trust, have confidence and patience.*

*Another one was to have patience. Everything in life takes time, especially renewing the heart, mind, body and soul. I need to be more patient with myself. Take a moment to breathe and relax within myself and proceed with patience.*

*Very cool one as well, trust. Because I was very scared at first so I had to feel it out by petting him and observing him until I felt safe and until I knew he was safe*

*with me. So I ended up loving him. And trust is key for bonding. Start trusting people and give them a chance.*

So those are just a few that we had with the fellas. So then the one guy, as we're handing out the journals on what my horse taught me, he said, *do I have to write it in these lines, or can I write my own way? On the back of it.* I'm like, *go to town, whatever. Can I write a letter?* Yes, this was a big marshmallow man. The cool part about this is that he's writing. He's writing and he's going through this. You can tell he's really pouring his heart into it. So before he gave it back to me because we do collect them. He says something else.

Now the interesting part is in the arena. He told me that he chose to go by himself because he's an introvert. He doesn't share with people. He doesn't try to build relationships necessarily with people. At the end, he wrote this out and asked if he could tell it to the guys. They all are in like, *yeah, of course man.* It was so beautiful.

This is what he wrote to Kokanee. And you guys should know we read this to Kokanee after. It was so stunning. We do read them to the horses. They deserve to hear what they've done for people as well.

Kokanee knew this was to him:

*Kokanee.*

*The freedom you gave me was instant. I have been in a prison of my mind for 37 years, and a physical prison for over half my life. You gave me the most freedom of mind and body. As far as I can remember. Nothing else mattered at all, just the connection we made. I have calmed.*

*I have carried so much pain and sadness that I bottled up in my life. The taps of emotion have been sealed since I was nine years old. You felt my pain*

*that I mask. I know you felt it. You carried my burden for me, for which I am thankful.*

*Carrying these memories of violence, death and prison have given me PTSD and sleepless nights. Thank you for helping me heal and letting me know you understand my pain by carrying it and me. I have a new friend. See you next week, buddy.*

You see, we can't even create magic like this. It's only the horses that can do such a thing. And this is why when we understand what these beautiful creatures need and then what they give back to these humans. It is profound. Because not only after they did all of this, they didn't want to leave!

We haven't had a group stay. They went out to have a smoke because they always need to have a smoke after, not all of them smoking, just being in the fresh air. But they continually kept coming back in.

So even this fella did. We were in the arena releasing, sweeping our horses. He came back in to share with us again not only how grateful and thankful he was of his experience. But also to let us know, *everyone in his life had died and he'd been abandoned since he was nine. He doesn't have parents.* It was such a sad story but he was so open, and wanting to share it and be vulnerable. That's been stuck in him for so long. Just like how he wrote to Kokanee. He carried it for him for that moment. And once we knew this part and everything it made so much sense as to what Kokanee was doing when he first got together with him. He was like, *"yeah, no, dude, let's get rid of this. Let's get rid of this man."* It was just so phenomenal.

And even before he had come back in, right as we ended, he was like, *can I just go out and say goodbye to Kokanee again?* And, you know, a lot of the time we don't bring in the same horses every time we let them in. You know, we see

different teaching methods in our horses. So we use a variety. But this man had shared a profound experience with Kokanee. We would put them together again.



***Kari Fulmek and  
Carolyn Charles -  
Equine Connection -  
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Learning***

## Chapter Five

### Family Herd Series

*Adapted to Non-Fiction Narrative by Krystyna Faroe*

When people remarry it is difficult for a child from the previous family sharing a parent with their half-siblings. In this instance the twelve year old was living with one parent and spending time with his other parents' new, younger family.

Not only does the age difference between them and the younger relatives cause relationship issues but the confidence of the older child living in a different place than the younger children can make it seem to them that they are an intruder.

The Family Herd Series opens up relationships between everyone. It helps bonding and team building. It opens lines of communication and honesty. By the end there is relaxation, camaraderie and confidence.

In the story below we have a family going through the above. Older boy of 12 and a new family boy of 6 and girl of 4

### Let's All Connect

Being the youngest of six siblings, I have often felt a disconnect due to age differences and surprisingly generational differences. I can't imagine how it must feel being a child from a prior marriage and trying to integrate into a young family on an every other week basis.

This is what Conner had to do every two weeks. Blend into a family that were years younger than him. He was a teenager and only one of his step family had

started school. Despite this he tried hard to connect with the young boy and accepted the kindergarten girl as, well, a girl (someone beyond his comprehension for now).



They arrived as a disjointed group, some in wellies and some in more casual footwear. Uncertain of what was to happen they sat in chairs before me, whilst dad hovered behind them, placing a hand on a shoulder every now and then. I went through the orientation, catching the vinyl posters as

they tried to blow off the hooks that held them.

After the oral orientation, I took them through the physical safety aspects, using Ginger, our Miniature Horse to demonstrate. With everything understood we moved on to the challenges.

The challenges are fun ways to engage a family to discuss and connect. I could see by his body language that things weren't going well for Conner. He stood like an outsider watching the family before him interact and configure possible conclusions to the challenges.

I always ask that everyone takes a turn working with their horse/pony/miniature horse. When it came to Conner's turn he was dismissive of the need for him to take part. Everyone else had connected and laughed through the course but Conner hadn't.

Begrudgingly, he took the lead shank and walked to the next challenge. His face scrunched as he read it. His slumped shoulders show no willingness to be part of it. Ginger wouldn't move when he tried to walk her forward.

He gave an alarmed look that rocked my heart. As if he'd done something wrong and felt ashamed.

With a soft smile, I gave him all of my attention and asked questions.

"Why do you think Ginger doesn't want to move?"

His face looked worried so I softened my tone even more.

"How do you feel right now?"

Embarrassment swept over him so I continued even though I'd received no answer, I knew the words were being processed and he was understanding where things were at.

"How does Ginger feel right now?"

Diverting the attention back to Ginger helped him to relax. Now he was considering his feelings and hers.

"She's unsure." Conner responded.

"Why do you think she's unsure?"

"Because I'm unsure."

I put a hand onto Ginger's neck and stroked her.

“How can we change this?”

His eyes fell upon Ginger and his hand went to her neck and stroked where my own hand had been. Conner was connecting with Ginger and realizing that his thoughts were disrupting the exercise.

“I can be confident and show her the way.”

“I love that!” My smile was wide as I looked at the rest of the family. I was thankful they had only listened and not interrupted.

Now, they stepped forward to partner with Conner. All of them. He was now the centre of attention as they all reread the challenge

It's a beautiful thing to see when a family melds perfectly, at this moment it happened.

They went through the challenge and I watched Conner laugh as they struggled in some parts of it. In the end there was success. But the success wasn't just from the challenge, it was from the family joining as a group to get through it.



When they all left, they were a unified family. Laughing and joking as they stepped into their truck.

I smiled with a sense of fulfilment, even though I didn't do the challenges, seeing the changes in the family

brought me the best self-satisfaction. I had been a part of their road to unity and that felt really good.

***Krystyna Nelson - Equine Assisted Learning Facilitator, Life, Wellness & Grief Coach - Harmony Farm Equineimity***

## Chapter Six

### Herd Experience



Only the patented Building Block programs are used within the Equine Connection - Academy of Equine Assisted learning. There are however other methods of equine experiential

learning out there. Sometimes herd experiences can be less demanding as a distance can be kept from the horses and interaction can be made by the client when they want. There are several schools of experiential learning. The main one is Epona by Linda Kohanov. The below experiential learning is *part* of Eponaquest training in British Columbia.

In any herd we are respectful of what the horse has to say so that they are respectful of ourselves and our boundaries.

## Meeting the Large Horses

*Adapted to Non-Fiction Narrative by Krystyna Faroe*

*Diana had been to a Women's Authentic You Workshop. There she'd gone through the program and session with a Miniature Horse. Diana was able to overcome her fear of horses beside them but she wanted to overcome her fear of real size horses. This is her experience.*

Stepping out of the car I glance at Diana, she squeezes my arm in encouragement. Linda is already beside me, I must be moving slowly as she was in the back seat. It's very cold, I can feel my cheeks already start to burn from the icy waves on the wind. I follow Diana through the gate wondering why I listened to her. This is not a good situation and despite the biting breeze my forehead is starting to sweat under my wool hat. My hands are clammy inside their gloves and I want to turn around and go back to my warm home and safe surroundings.

The last time I was at Harmony Farm Rice Lake I had a wonderful time. Today is different. On that day the horses were miniature, now I'm meeting real size horses. Ugh! Why did I agree? Why did I believe? I don't want these large animals in my life and I don't need them so why am I here?

Linda is beside me.

"Are you okay Alice?"

I give a non-convincing nod. I'm sure the taut skin and tight lips give away my feelings so I try to force a smile. I can tell you forcing a smile when your face is freezing and your body has turned to brittle plastic is uncomfortable. Linda's face shows it wasn't successful as she almost backs up. It is probably more of a

creepy clown smile but without the upstretched curve, just a frozen line showing a few teeth. Eek!

Krystyna walks towards us, ever smiling and always looking happy. She offers some comfort but not enough. Diana is already giving her a hug. Krystyna looks towards me and gazes on in sympathy. My fear has struck its hand onto my heart.

“Let me know if you’re uncomfortable when we’re out in the field. If the horses come too close I can move them away.” Her smile is authentic and open to trust so I nod my head in agreement.

When we go into the field the horses are eating hay. They raise their heads to check us out and drop them again, contentedly chewing. I give a sigh of relief. I’m not sure what I expected, a stampede, quick movements toward us to search for *treats*. We have none. Will they be mad at that? Will they stomp their front feet in frustration?

Krystyna is beside me. “You are right to fear something so big. That is a 1200lb animal. They are prey and live by fight or flight. We are predators. Yet, they trust and want to be with us.” Her glance falls upon them as they move around. “I’m here if you need me.”

Off she goes leaving me. I don’t know if I’m glad to be alone with my fear or horrified that she’s left me to it. I realize she’s not that far away and she’s constantly watching where the horses are and where we are. I feel a little better, just a little.

The scent of hay carries in the air and a musky, earthy smell. I can’t tell if it’s just from the hay or from the horses as well. The snow gives way below my feet as I walk with Linda. I feel like I might be pulled into a crevice at any moment. I know I’m being over reactive and I make an attempt to pull myself together.

Diana can't help herself, she's already in the midst of the herd and loving it. I take another deep breath and wonder at myself again. I must really love and believe in my sister to do this.

As I stand thinking, I notice that I am not as afraid as usual. I actually feel a sense of peace watching Diana in amongst the horses and Krystyna saying *hello* to one of them. I notice how calm and quiet they are around Diana and Krystyna. I can sense the trust and love that is there. The blowing noses aren't frightening, they are soft and Hollytle upon them. I can see they are communicating, it is kind, it says we love you. How profound!

I feel a soft nuzzling on my shoulder, I swiftly turn to see a large head quickly rise up and then drop down to stare at me. A large brown horse with the kindest of eyes is looking at me. I look up, knowing how small I am in comparison but the fear doesn't crush me. His muzzle rests upon me again and in surprise I note I am not afraid, not at all. His huge head is resting upon my shoulder and is now nuzzling softly into me. It is a wonderful feeling, so careful, so precise, his nose is now wiggling upon my upper arm. No fear of teeth, or a head butt, just the gentleness of a lamb. My heart bursts.

Krystyna is beside me without me knowing.

"How do you feel?"

I reply that *I feel good and not unsafe at all.*

"He's helping to ground you so you can release your fear. He's letting you know you're safe."

They're words that move me. I feel incredible being beside Parker. His big brown head drops close to me, I can see a thin white stripe running down from his

forehead to his pink and black nose. He's letting me know, everything is alright. My feelings are heightened, I feel an aura around me, elevation from the heaviness I felt before. I float beside him, my mind and body enjoying the feeling of lightness, happiness but most of all *safety*.

He moves away as if he knows his job is done. I watch him slowly move back into the herd and eat hay. I am so connected I can hear every chew of the fibres as he crunches them between his teeth. The sound is one of contentment.

Turning away I see a beautiful grey horse with white legs standing alone. I feel for her being away from the rest of the herd and a need to connect jolts me to walk toward her. Her head rises on my approach so I stop. She drops her head and I walk up to her shoulder, she doesn't move. Just stands still, her head slightly turned watching me. I feel no fear. My confidence is abundant and my need for further experience is driving me on, I place my hand upon her neck. She's still as I stroke her following the lay of her hair.

She's smaller than Parker. Diana tells me her name is Cotton. I want to tell her that I adore Cotton. There is something between us, we share something, I'm not sure what it is but this isn't a time for talking. It's a time for enjoying the peace and tranquility that is traveling through both of us. Me and Cotton.

As we're driving home and my mind is thoughtful. I am filled with amazement at my achievements today and the incredible experience I have been through. I can still smell the musk of Parker and Cotton. The softness of their fur beneath my gloved hands, the warmth when I tuck my hand under Cotton's mane. A mane of grey, white, black and brown. I marvel at nature's pick of colours that are so beautiful. To me Cotton is magnificent, her pure white face and grey speckled coat appeal to me, but it is her strong, silent stature that makes me admire her most. Stable enough to stand alone, no fear within her, just a knowing of herself and her capabilities.

I close my eyes and feel Parker on my shoulder once more. I feel his soft breath blowing upon my neck as he lifts his head away from my turning body. Even in that moment he takes care of me, so as not to accidentally hit me with his head.



I remember the feeling of relaxation beside Cotton. Forgetting the cold weather and being two friends together, enjoying a special moment. Knowing her temperament and personality I now wonder why I was ever afraid of horses. I revel

in my new found positive energy. I bathe in the knowledge that I am capable. She has shown me I am strong. I need not fear. Most of all I know, this is a day I will never forget.

## Conclusion

Alice's fear has been long standing for many years. Her love for her family is shown by her going through her fear experiences again and again. It isn't that Alice disliked horses, she didn't understand them. Her learning of equines through the Women's Authentic You Spa Day, was left to ruminate within her. She didn't have expectations of concern with the miniature horses because they were small. When it came to experiencing large horses in their own environment where they were safe was a different experience to being on top of a horse and walking along unknown trails.

The horses were her equal in their natural environment, they knew that and Alice later sensed it through their response to help her achieve calm. They knew there

was nothing to fear, their own heightened senses told them. There was no disturbance to their group energy other than Alice's fear. Parker took on the role of alleviator by helping Alice reground herself to the earth.

Cotton helped Alice understand that although equines are fight or flight, it is only activated when there may truly be a good cause. Alice realized that horses are calm and slow, only in certain situations are they wary and swift. Alice's own nervous system had been ignited into a sympathetic state when she knew she was going horse riding. She did not have full control over the horse, nor did she truly understand the horse's own mental functions.

Through a safe environment she was able to go back to her parasympathetic nervous system. She learned what horses are about and essentially that these particular horses had a job to help people. Once she realized this her progression away from her fear quickly occurred.

With the stimulation of good hormones came relaxation, confidence, self-awareness and strength. Taking these experiences and packing them into her life toolkit box Alice is now aware of why she held fear and how she can handle it should the issue come up once more.

***Krystyna Nelson - Equine Assisted Learning Facilitator & Life, Wellness & Grief Coach - Harmony Farm Equineimity***

## Anxiety

There are many reasons for anxiety. Mainly we link the word with post traumatic stress but anxiety can come about from any form of stress and believe me that list could go on forever.

We've covered fear as a form of anxiety and our following client had a fear of horses which she brilliantly overcame. When the time and place are right we can move forward and give ourselves a pat on the back.

Jill's anxiety on the day below was different and we'll find out why.

## Story of Jill

*Adapted to Non-Fiction Narrative by Krystyna Faroe*

Jill's the kind of woman that you love as a friend. Her demeanor is kind, her approach gentle and her heart always giving. Jill had overcome her fear of horses in a very short period of time. I mean very short, five minutes short!

She impresses me so much as she is now riding her horse and doing very well. It's always a joy to teach her. Jill had moved from the Authentic You Workshop to Intuitive Riding lessons. Her success at both was fabulous.

Today Jill arrives for her riding lesson but I notice she sits in the car longer than normal. I'm standing with Marley wondering what is different today. As she comes down the driveway and I walk towards her I can see the muscle tension in her body and face. There is a white salty substance at both ends of her mouth as if a sea has dried.

It's her expression that grasps my heart. Her usual smile is gone and there is pain which sits upon her like a stifling blanket that she's grasping at to be released. I know something is wrong but I can't ask. It isn't my place even though I think of her as a friend now. My position as a facilitator forbids me forming any kind of therapy without the professional background of a degree.

I can see she's in no mood for riding but I ask anyway.

"I'd rather not." She responds, her words softly drifting away.

Marley is getting antsy in the arena where he is tied.

"How about you help me take Marley back to his field and the herd?"

Her nod clunks downwards as if her head weighs too much for the movement. I untie Marley and hand him to her. I open the gate and Jill and Marley quietly walk through. He's hanging back a little. He knows something is going on too.

When we reach the second gate that I open. I let Jilly take Marley's halter and lead shank off. She watches him walk away, his plump body swaying as his front legs swing out to the side. A movement of most Peruvian Paso horses. I smile at his overly expressive action. Jill is just staring as if she isn't seeing anything.

"This would be a good day for a herd experience." I say brightly and wish I'd toned it down.

Jill nods. "That would be nice."

We wander into the twenty acre field where the horses are scattered grazing. Marley has joined them and his own head is down taking no notice of us as he enjoys the sweetness of the grass.

"I'll let you walk alone Jill." I say as I fall back, "Let me know anytime you're uncomfortable."

It's strange how when a person is depressed their steps seem to be in slow motion. As I watch Jill's hunched body move I'm pulled into a time lapse. Her foot is raised, it falls, her other is raised and falls. For a person who tends to *go a lot*, it was almost hard to bear. My concern for Jill draws me away from that.

I make sure I'm not too far away so I can step in and ask the horses to move away if they become too overwhelming. I notice Chilling approaching Jill with a rumor. These two mares hold so much love for everyone they fill my heart. Behind them is Dusza, a young filly who holds more intuition than I've seen in a lot of horses.

They surround Jill and I'm ready to step forward to intervene but Jill doesn't ask for help. There are three horses touching her, they move away for two others who gently nuzzle Jill. I'm concerned that this is totally too much. I'd be concerned for myself and I know my horses. I stay still despite itching to walk over.

I've learned about chakras through Reiki. I didn't believe in this healing energy that is out there and people carry with them to heal others. I do now. I took animal reiki too and used it on my poor Boston Terrier who was prone to seizures. It amazed me how I could stop it right away. Normally she'd have 3 seizures before they'd be over. Not when I was doing reiki with her.

The horses were nuzzling her heart chakra through her back, her arms and her chest. One was behind her throat chakra, softly using her lips to move the blockages. My filly was at her feet, helping to ground her and bring her energy to the earth.

The sight was beautiful and somehow not even terrifying that over 5,000lbs of animals are so close to Jill. I am in awe.

Calmly Jill walks towards me as the horses move back to grazing.

Her eyes are brighter, her body is relaxed and a deep sigh escapes her lips. The horses have helped her release her tensions.

As we walk back I keep quiet allowing Jill to ruminate over her feelings. Our steps are slow and timed together as if we're in a marching parade. We're synchronized and I smile at that.

"My husband died seven years ago today."

I'm quickly brought out of my reverie.

“I’m so sorry Jill!”

“I nursed him until the end. I can’t get over his loss.” She pauses for a moment. Every year it hurts and I’ve been in a relationship for years with someone I love. But each year on the day of his death I fall apart. I am lucky to have a partner who is understanding. He supports me through this even though it’s hard on him.”

“I’m glad he is there for you Jill.”

Jill nods and stares at the ground.

“There was a lot going on with the horses and you.”

Her attention shifts from the grass back to me.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m going by chakra energies here. This is what I noticed. They’re just observations Jill but they might have meaning for you.”

Jill softly nods her head as she listens.

“Horses will go to your heart chakra. This is their way of allowing you to be part of the herd.” I smile to help her relax. “Within the herd environment each horse has a place and with that comes some responsibilities. The lead mare decides when the herd is to move on to other pastures. Below her, the mares keep the younger horses in line by setting boundaries and having them follow those boundaries. You also have horses that keep watch. They act as sentinels and keep the herd safe within the edges as guides. In the wild the stallion would also be on lookout and warn the herd of possible harm.”

Jill looks surprised. "I didn't realize there were so many intricacies in a herd."

I smile. "A lot more than people think." My stride slows as I continue. "They went to your heart chakra letting you know you're safe and cared for. They also went to your throat chakra so you could find your voice and explain your emotions. Dusza grounded you by going to your feet so you could release your stresses."

I stop as I come to my last words, Jill looks at me intensely which makes me swallow and wonder if I should continue.

"At one point they touched your solar plexus."

She's looking at me intently and I wonder whether or not I should continue. This is not science, this is not part of being a facilitator. If I go on I am broaching upon something a friend would say. I suck in a breath and carry on.

"Solar plexus is where we hold shame, guilt. Perhaps you feel you didn't do enough for him?"

Jill's eyes turn away and I feel I've gone too far.

"I know I did everything I could but I wonder if there could have been more."

I nod. It's out in the open for her to consider. I know we all wonder if there could have been something else we could have done in these situations.

We start to walk again.

"I can't change what happened and I know in my heart I did my best. I'll always miss him. He was such a big part of my life. This is my day of mourning him and remembering how his leaving hurt."

My voice is soft as I say. “It’s a day to remember him and how good it was to be with him. Re-living the pain isn’t the only way to acknowledge he was in your life. He’d want you to go through the happy memories too.”

“Yes, he would want that.” Jill’s voice quivers and we both fall silent again as I walk her to her car.

“Take care,” I say as I give her a hug.

She nods, steps into the car and soon she is driving down the road.

My mind wanders to the word grief. It’s a difficult word that covers so much more than we realize. Accepting that it may never leave. I wonder how we continue with a continual ache in our hearts. I realize we’re built to persevere, that moving forward is what we do, whilst holding that piece of our past lives deep within us, to mourn when our need arises.



***Krystyna Nelson - Equine  
Assisted Learning Facilitator &  
Life, Wellness & Grief Coach -  
Harmony Farm Equineimity***

## Chapter Seven

### Leadership and Team Development

I find it fascinating to observe how horses behave in herds. Even at our stables here, we can clearly pick out the roles that our domesticated horses have instinctively carried over from the wild.

In a herd, horses must rely on each other for the overall health, harmony and unity of the entire group. To do this, they are highly attuned to one another and function under an effective system of shared leadership that has ensured their survival for millions of years. There's much human leaders can learn here, because having confidence in others is crucial for us too.

The challenge of trusting others

Letting go is a big challenge for many; in fact, London Business School professor John Hunt says only 30 percent of managers think they can delegate well. Out of these managers who think they can delegate, only a third of the people they manage agree with them.

Most often, leaders are promoted because they are good at their jobs. And as a result, they progress into more senior roles that have the added responsibility of managing people. More often than not, they have very little experience doing so nor receive focused leadership training. As well as this, it's reasonably common to find a manager running off their feet, doing the work of multiple people and having no time for those they lead.

Leadership can therefore feel like a burden, especially if you are trying to take on all the responsibility alone. This can negatively affect decision making, lead to decreased motivation and eventually burnout. Fortunately, agile leadership,

sharing responsibility, delegating tasks and building confidence in others are skills that can be learned.

We can actually learn a lot from nature. When we humans take examples from nature and adopt them, it's called 'biomimicry'. This approach takes systems tested by nature that have worked over millions of years and adapt/adopt them for our benefit.

As mentioned above in relation to horses, animal groups have evolved effective ways of navigating their way through the uncertainty of every single day. It is selfless, collaborative and appropriate for the environment in which they live.

Our domestic horses retain the instincts of their wild cousins, who have survived their uncertain environment for millions of years through a collaborative system of shared leadership. By working alongside horses, we can experience this for ourselves. We can actually feel what it is like to be an accepted part of the group and how it feels to function in different roles. As a leader, we can play with what is working and what is not. And – most importantly – we can relate this back to our interactions with people in our everyday lives in the office, at home, anywhere.

In our coaching sessions, each client group is split into smaller teams and selects a horse to work alongside. Together, they navigate various challenges that require collective problem solving, as well as highlight different leadership styles and dynamics at play within the team. During a recent leadership development session with the key talent cohort of a large IT company, one particular participant stood out. He had a domineering leadership style and was trying to impose his view on everyone, rather than working collaboratively. While his human team members seemed to be used to this behaviour and (kind of) accepted it, our horse, Kylie, was not and did not!

Kylie's reluctance to follow this person really hit home for him and the team. What was really going on here? Kylie's obvious response gave him and the other team members the permission to speak out. There was no malice or ill-intent, it's just

he was – like many managers – a very task-oriented person who simply forgot to check-in with the team. And his louder style and perceived confidence discouraged his peers to speak up and share their ideas.

This was a pivotal moment in leadership skills development for the entire team. And it took a four-legged, 600 kg teammate to make it happen.

How confident are you in others?

If you're interested in assessing your own confidence in others, try a simple exercise.

Think of a time that you felt run off your feet. Could you have delegated in a more effective way? How would confidence in both yourself and others have helped? Now, try to think of a time that you delegated well and shared the responsibility. Can you compare the two experiences?

From here, you can consider whether this is an area of growth for you or not.



Having confidence in others is a vital building block in great leadership.

**Jane  
Hemingway-Mohr -  
Leading Edge  
Professional  
Development,  
Australia**

## Internal vs External Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a cornerstone of personal growth, effective communication, and strong leadership. It has two distinct but interconnected dimensions: internal self-awareness (understanding our own values, goals, emotions, strengths, and weaknesses) and external self-awareness (recognising how others perceive us). When these two areas are balanced, we gain clarity about who we are and how we impact the world around us.

### Internal Self-Awareness

Internal self-awareness allows us to connect with our inner world—our motivations, passions, and limitations. With it, we can make better decisions, set realistic goals, and build resilience. For example, someone who recognises that they thrive in collaborative environments can actively pursue roles that play to this strength. Without internal self-awareness, however, we risk chasing goals that don't align with who we really are.

### External Self-Awareness

External self-awareness focuses on how others experience us. Leaders, for instance, may believe they are being “direct” when in reality they come across as harsh or intimidating. Honest feedback is crucial here, as it reveals blind spots and helps us understand the ripple effects of our behaviour. Those who develop strong external self-awareness foster trust, collaboration, and psychological safety in their relationships and workplaces.

## The Balance Between the Two

The challenge lies in maintaining balance. Overemphasising internal self-awareness can make us self-absorbed, while relying solely on external feedback may cause us to lose authenticity. True self-awareness emerges when we integrate both perspectives—knowing who we are internally while staying open to how others see us. This balance requires humility, curiosity, and a willingness to act on feedback.

## Where Equine Assisted Learning Comes In

Horses offer a unique pathway to developing both forms of self-awareness. As highly sensitive, non-judgmental beings, they respond immediately and honestly to human behaviour, providing a kind of feedback that is both powerful and compassionate.

- Internal self-awareness through horses: Working with a horse requires presence, clarity, and emotional regulation. Horses mirror our internal state—if we are anxious, unfocused, or inconsistent, the horse reflects that back to us. This immediate feedback helps participants recognise their emotions, body language, and energy levels, deepening their understanding of themselves.
- External self-awareness through horses: Because horses are attuned to subtle cues, they reveal how our actions and energy are perceived. A person who thinks they are being calm and approachable may find that the horse keeps its distance, signalling a mismatch between intention and

impact. This mirrors the human experience: how others perceive us may not always align with how we see ourselves.

## Building Awareness Through Action

Unlike traditional feedback, which can feel uncomfortable or judgmental, equine-assisted learning provides experiential feedback in a safe and non-verbal way. Instead of asking “Why do I always struggle in these situations?” participants are encouraged to reflect on “What happened in this interaction with the horse?” and “What can I adjust to create a better connection?” This shift from “why” to “what” transforms self-reflection into constructive action.

## The Bigger Picture

Equine assisted learning reinforces the principle that self-awareness is not just about individual growth but about fostering connection, trust, and collaboration. Just as effective leaders put the success of their teams above individual wins, working successfully with a horse requires partnership, respect, and clear communication.



Self-awareness—both internal and external—is a lifelong journey. By working with horses, individuals gain an experiential, embodied understanding of how they show up in the world and how they affect those around them. This balance

of self-knowledge and relational awareness not only strengthens personal growth but also enhances leadership, teamwork, and authentic human connection.

***Jane Hemingway-Mohr - Leading Edge Professional Development***

## Leading With Core Values

Those of you who read my blog will know that I regularly publish a 'Word of the Week'. It is usually tied to an anecdote from our work and my hope is that it is a bit inspirational, a "food for thought" type thing.

At an end of year celebration with friends, one of the people challenged us all to come up with one word that captures what we want for ourselves for 2023.

The criteria were broad – basically any value, principle, state of being or doing – that we felt was right for us as an individual. It could be something we were aiming for, something we wanted more of, something we were working on, hoping for...

It's quite tricky to think of one word for a whole year but we all managed to do it. We had health, balance, joy, opportunity, flow, consistency, freedom, spark, love, gratitude and – my word – kindness.

The best part of the exercise was listening to why each person chose the word that they did and what they were planning on doing to achieve their word.

There are a few reasons I chose this special word. Firstly, like many people, I am my own harshest critic. I would never speak to my friends, family, colleagues or clients the way I allow my inner voice to speak to me. So, I decided to be kinder to myself.

Secondly, in the words of Brené Brown, "clear is kind". In the past, I have found those difficult to have conversations...well, difficult to have. So, I decided to be clearer.

And thirdly, that bit of judgement that creeps in every now and again, is not kind. So I decided to stop myself and reflect on why I am being judgemental and what is that saying about me.

The irony in this for me is that horses teach us about self-care, clarity and non-judgement. So it's like with our programs I'm teaching what I need to learn. As the proverb goes, "Physician, heal thyself".



***Jane Hemingway-Mohr - Leading Edge Professional Development, Australia***

## The Many Faces of Leadership: Why the Long Face?

Leadership is one of those rich, complex topics that has been explored through countless models, theories, and frameworks over the years. From transformational to servant leadership, situational to systems thinking, each model offers a unique lens on how leadership works—and all are valid in their own right.

Each model provides something valuable because leadership is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour. It's contextual. It's human. And increasingly, it's collective. That's where the **Diamond Model of Shared Leadership** comes in—offering a different kind of leadership experience, one that's grounded in real-time, embodied learning, and, perhaps unexpectedly, involves horses.

### **A New Way In: The Diamond Model of Shared Leadership™**

The **Diamond Model of Shared Leadership**™ is not just another conceptual framework. It's experiential. It's dynamic. And it's deeply rooted in what happens when we step away from theory and into the paddock.

At the heart of this model is a simple yet powerful truth: **leadership is not about one person having all the answers—it's about the collective wellbeing and effectiveness of the group**. The Diamond Model helps leaders explore and embody four key capabilities that enable this shared approach:

- **Placing Attention** – tuning into what's really happening, within ourselves, others, and the environment
- **Setting a Direction** – establishing clarity and purpose without overpowering
- **Using Appropriate Energy** – knowing when to push, when to pause, and how to engage with influence rather than force

- **Being Congruent** – aligning our inner state with our outward behaviour, fostering trust and authenticity

These are not just ideas to think about—they are skills to practice. And this is where horses play an extraordinary role.

### **Why Horses?**

Horses are extremely sensitive – as prey animals their survival depends on their ability to sense even the slightest change in their environment. They are also a herd animal – operating collectively has ensured the success of their species. Why is this important to us humans? They respond not to your title or your talking points, but to your presence, your intention, and your congruence. When you engage with a horse, it becomes strikingly clear if you are leading with clarity—or if your energy is scattered. Horses naturally seek connection, clarity, and safety—just like people do in teams.

Through carefully facilitated exercises with horses, leaders gain tangible, visceral insight into how they are showing up—and how they might shift in order to foster **health, harmony, and unity** in their teams and organisations.

### **Leadership, Shared.**

The goal of shared leadership is not to dilute responsibility, but to distribute capability. It's about cultivating an environment where leadership flows to where it's most needed—moment by moment. This approach encourages resilience, psychological safety, and collective intelligence.

As one of our clients from Hannover Re recently shared, “Exploring the shared leadership concepts through the exercises with the horses gave me great insights into the common challenges we face as leaders.”

That's the power of experiential learning. The horses don't just help us understand leadership.

They help us **feel** it, live it, and integrate it.

There are many valid leadership models out there—and each offers a unique and valuable perspective. What sets the Diamond Model of Shared Leadership™ apart is its focus on **embodied, relational leadership** that puts the wellbeing of the whole system at the centre.

***Jane Hemingway-Mohr - Leading Edge Professional Development, Australia***



## Artificial Intelligence vs Animal Instinct: Rediscovering Human

### Connection in an Age of Algorithms

I just read the *2025 Skills Horizon* report and it got me thinking about the contrast between Animal Instinct (AI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) — and how reconnecting with our human instincts is critical in a tech-saturated, AI-driven future.

#### Animal Instinct vs Artificial Intelligence: Rediscovering Human Connection in an Age of Algorithms

My husband is an IT partner in a global consulting firm and excitedly tells me of developments in the digital world, especially the advancements in AI. It is mind-blowing! On hearing this and doing my own research, I believe that the more sophisticated AI becomes, the more vital it is to remain deeply human.

As we accelerate into a decade defined by artificial intelligence, automation, and synthetic realities, an ancient intelligence quietly calls out to us — not coded in lines of software but hardwired in evolution: animal instinct.

This primal, embodied intelligence — intuition, empathy, social connection, ethical impulse — has guided humans for millennia. But in a world reshaped by the relentless logic of machines, we risk sidelining these vital faculties. And the stakes are high.

## The Rise of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence has become the defining force of our time. From generative models that can simulate human conversation, to algorithms that drive decisions in healthcare, finance, and hiring — AI is no longer a tool. It's its own ecosystem. And it's changing how we work, think, and relate.

The *2025 Skills Horizon* report describes AI not just as a productivity enhancer, but as a profound cultural force. AI fluency and generative AI usage are listed as critical leadership skills — capabilities that amplify everything else.

But alongside these opportunities comes a deep tension: As AI becomes more human-like, will humans become more machine-like?

## Animal Instinct: The Lost Intelligence

Unlike artificial intelligence, animal instinct is not programmed — it is felt. It resides in our gut decisions, our empathetic impulses, our social rhythms, and our non-verbal cues. It is the source of trust, intuition, moral judgment, and belonging. And it cannot be automated.

Ironically, as AI begins to replicate outward signs of intelligence — language, creativity, decision-making — what separates us isn't cognition. It's a connection.

“Our leaders must be much more human... more caring and more innovative.”

David Gonski AC, Chancellor, UNSW

In disorienting times, this natural intelligence becomes our compass. We need to re-attune ourselves to the human — even the animal — in how we lead.

## The Urgency of Human Connection

The *2025 Skills Horizon* outlines five global shifts — values, technology, accountability, trust, and energy — all of which are destabilising traditional leadership models. Amid synthetic media, geopolitical fragmentation, and algorithmic decision-making, the greatest scarcity may be authentic human presence.

The report introduces “Productive Work Communities” as a critical amplifier of all leadership skills. And this requires emotional intelligence, flexibility, storytelling, and the ability to foster psychological safety — all rooted in our instinct to belong and connect.

“The truth is no longer the truth... Opinions become the new truth.”

Morten Wierod, CEO, ABB

In a world of deepfakes and misinformation, trust is no longer a default — it’s a deliberate act. Leaders must now build trust at scale, not through technological prowess alone, but by tapping into the animal instinct of authentic connection.

### Rediscovering the Human Operating System

We often talk about AI as if it’s a new brain. But the future will belong to those who understand that the human operating system is not just logical — it’s emotional, embodied, and ethical.

- Empathy over efficiency
- Listening over automation
- Presence over performance

“What you will need is a new type of competence... like social sciences and humanities.” Dragoş Tudorache, Chair, EU AI Committee

Skills like humanities thinking, leading across generations, and mental wealth are rising to the top of the leadership agenda. These are not digital skills — they are animal instincts in disguise

### Instinct as Strategy

All of this made me think that in the age of Artificial Intelligence, Animal Instinct is not regression — it's resilience.

We must remember that what makes us most effective as leaders isn't how well we simulate intelligence, but how deeply we connect, relate, and care. The true power lies not in beating the machine — but in being more human than ever before.

So the next time you're on your laptop or phone, ask yourself:

Can it feel trust? Can it build belonging? Can it hold ambiguity?



**Jane  
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## Agility in the face of Uncertainty

Based on the insightful article, “How to Become an Agile Learner”, from the Harvard Business Review by Helen Tupper and Sarah Ellis, it’s clear that mastering the three building blocks of agile learning: navigating newness, understanding others, and self-awareness, is crucial in today’s dynamic work environment. Equine assisted learning (EAL) activities intentionally designed to meet professional development objectives are gaining recognition as a unique and impactful method to bring to life these aspects of agile learning for leaders and their teams.

The article defines the three core building blocks of agile learning in summary as follows:

1. **Navigating Newness:** Agile learners thrive in fresh, complex scenarios even without a blueprint, embracing the ambiguity as an opportunity rather than a barrier.
2. **Understanding Others:** They excel at empathizing and anticipating varying perspectives, fostering a collaborative and open-minded approach to problem-solving.
3. **Self-awareness:** With high levels of self-awareness, agile learners are proactive in seeking feedback and continuously curious, embodying a growth mindset.
- 4.

Equine enhanced professional development activities enable participants to put these building blocks into practice and experience their impact first-hand and in real time:

1. **Navigating Newness:** By interacting with horses in intentionally designed activities, leaders step into uncharted territory, which significantly

enhances their comfort level with ambiguity and nurtures their ability to navigate through new situations.

2. **Understanding Others:** The program enhances empathy and understanding of non-verbal communication through interaction with horses, and enhances verbal communication between the human participants, preparing individuals to better appreciate and engage with diverse perspectives in the workplace.
3. **Self-awareness:** Equine enhanced activities prompt reflection and self-insight, fostering a heightened sense of self-awareness crucial for personal and professional development.

One of our clients from Bluefin Resources, sums up her experience with us as; “Horses thrive on clear direction, effective communication, and trust to navigate challenges and perform at their best. They also have an extraordinary ability to sense energy and assess their surroundings. As a leader, they’ll immediately pick up on your confidence and ability, or lack of! Trust me, you can’t make a 500kg horse move without taking charge, making them feel safe, and earning their trust. It’s all about authentic leadership in action, and I was amazed at how much this mirrors real world team dynamics.” Rebekah Crichton, Senior Divisional Manager & Executive Consultant – Change Management, HR, People Strategy, L&D & Organisational Design at Bluefin Resources.

Integrating equine assisted learning into your organisational training could be a step towards building a more agile, empathetic, and self-aware workforce, ready to thrive in the face of new challenges.



*Jane Hemingway-Mohr - Leading Edge Professional Development, Australia*

## Chapter Eight

### Why We Do This!

Aanii,

Webj'waan Kwe, Strong Moving Current. I am a member of the Pike Clan. My English name is Shannon (Bouchard) Carroll. I am a registered member of Sagamok Anishnawbek. I grew up in an era that was before my time, without hydro or running water. And to be honest, I wouldn't have it any other way. The life I have had, helps me appreciate the life that I have now.

In addition to being the Owner, Operator, Certified Equine Facilitator and Equine Assisted Personal Development Coach, I have also worked for the Mental Health and Addictions team at Sagamok Naandwedjige–Gamik as Administrative Support Worker, and part-time Counsellor. This is where I truly found my inner strength and courage to begin this journey.

I am a female indigenous entrepreneur, striving to make the dark days a little brighter for some who are struggling with their own battles against this world, as well as themselves. Knowing firsthand the positive effects of having equine presence during my own struggles, I thrive to have this support available to many others who wish to seek professional help, while on the land and outdoors. At Burrden Acres we keep our indigenous roots, values and culture in each and every session. At Burrden Acres, we "Leave the burden at the gate™"



*Shannon (Bouchard) Carroll - Burrden Acres*

## Why We Do This!

### Aaron's Story

If you would have told me ten years ago that one day I would be working with horses facilitating life skills, I would have called you a liar. I'm a little different than most of the people that have done this course in the fact that I had no horse experience – and never really had a desire previously to get any. I had grown up with dogs and thought that was good enough. It was not until Kari asked me to come on board to help with marketing and technology stuff that I started to truly understand the teaching power that they possess.

So initially Kari asked me to come out to Saskatchewan with her to see some programs and meet the program designer. So I went out and it was cold. I don't deal well with being cold and I don't hide it well either, so Kari was very aware that I was not super impressed with being there. At first, I didn't get it. All of these people were so in love with the horses and talking about how amazing they were, but I hadn't yet connected the dots. In fact, they kind of freaked me out. They were huge and I also found out that I am fairly allergic to them as well. It wasn't until I got to watch them in action that it really "clicked".

As I stood back watching the teens working with the horses, the team leaders for the youth program were chatting with me. They were telling me the stories of these children – where they had come from, the things that they had done, the challenges that they faced and how "troubled" they were. But these were not the teens I was seeing in front of me. I watched intently as the horses reacted to the situations that the groups were in and reacted to the authentic stimulus of the client and I finally got it! I witnessed first hand how the clients reacted with these beautiful creatures and how they truly listened to them to create a change within themselves.

That night, Kari and I went out for dinner and she asked what I thought. If I was in for helping her with this project. Now, I am not a cryer. Never have been. But something about the day had touched my heart and started a new path and passion and I actually started to cry as I said, "Yes! I am absolutely in!"

From there, it was a bit of a learning curve. There was a lot of fear to get over and a lot of skills to build and the place that I was at in life wasn't necessarily a happy one. At first I was up in Leduc doing marketing. While I was there I had my beautiful daughter (the light of my life) and ended up with post-partum depression. I didn't have any friends around and came home to Calgary as often as I possibly could as I felt very alone. My self esteem was as low as it had ever been – not like it had ever been that high – and although I had confidence, and outwardly people would never have known what a dark place I was in, I was a shell of a human being.

After about a year of living in Leduc, we were thankfully transferred back to Calgary (woohoo!) When I moved back home I thought things would get better. Maybe my problems would all be solved! Well turns out that isn't the way life works. I was still in a pretty rough place in life. Shortly after we moved home, a huge blow hit and suddenly my marriage was over. I felt lost, betrayed and like a failure. Now what? I didn't even know who I was anymore. How would I move forward? How would I support my daughter and I as I was making very little money at this point.

So Kari came over and helped me make a plan. We figured out what she could pay me to make it work, but I was going from a six figure household income to a significantly less household income. I panicked. I wasn't sure if I could continue on with EAL. Did I need to get a different job?

So I needed to think on all of this, and at this point I was a certified facilitator and working with the horses regularly and facilitating programs. However, the horses were not exactly working with me the same way. Every time I worked with the

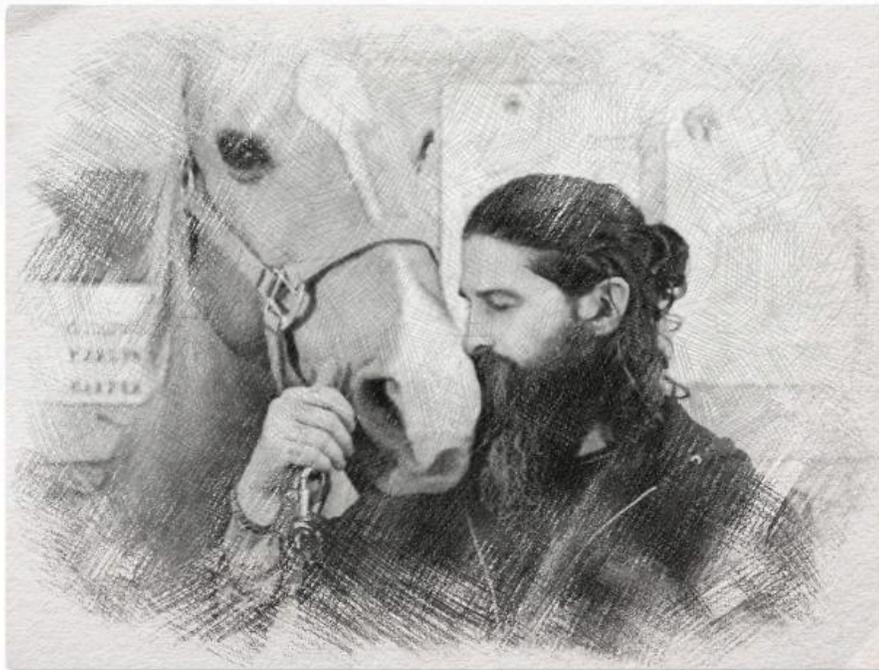
horses – any horse – they would bite me. Or push me around. And I don't mean like little bites. I went home everyday looking like a leopard.

It's odd. Anytime in life before this, I would have quit. I would have thought that it was a sign to go and get another job and I'm not sure why my brain didn't go there, but I knew that they were reacting to the twisted mess that my insides were at that point.

About three weeks later, Kari (who had been incredibly patient up to that point) told me she needed an answer. So I went home that weekend in complete turmoil, not knowing what I was going to do. I don't know what happened – I don't even know the moment that I made the decision but I decided that if mama is happy, baby is happy. This was my passion. I needed to do this for myself. So I went in to work on Monday and told Kari that I was in for the long haul. I was never bitten again by a single horse.

If it weren't for me recognizing the teaching that the horses were trying to do with me, I would have quit. I would have aborted my passion and probably be working behind a desk somewhere today. To this day, they are my greatest teachers. I have grown as a person because of them. Because I could step into being the leader of my own life. A leader to myself. Believing that I am worth more. I know that the horses believed in me and my capabilities enough to take the time to bite the crap out of me for three weeks. Being a facilitator is not just about changing the lives of others, but taking a journey to change your own life. I love my job. I love my life and I love the person that I have become. I am confident and I have self esteem. I know now that this is the greatest thing I could have done for myself – to take the teachings of the horse to heart and to find out the answers that truly matter to find my authentic self.

It was a life changing experience that left me empowered and excited about my future... Something that was lost upon my exit from the Armed Forces. It's a beautiful feeling to have purpose again.



**Aaron**

## Tanya & Todd's Story

### Why do we do what we do?

Whether you believe it or not, horses talk to you all the time. More than you could ever imagine.

In this program, you are presented with many different obstacles. These obstacles are representations of our own lives and the different obstacles that we may be facing.

Tanya said that this course has contributed to not only her learning for the business, but her own learning, as well. She explained how these obstacles in the course helped her to understand the different ways she can look at things such as communication, overcoming things and being able to learn all these different life skills and take them into so many different directions.

Todd was able to sum up the course in two words: life skills. He said, "the biggest thing I have learned through this last week was life skills. I have learned more about myself this week than I have in years."

Absolutely fantastic course and would we recommend it to others?  
**HANDS DOWN.**



And that is why we do what we do.

***Tanya & Todd***

## Tara's Story

I did the online learn at your own pace training and then had to wait 6 months before being able to get to the training centre for my 3 day in person training.

Going to the in person workshop was actually a profound experience.

First, I had an issue with my vehicle on my way to the very first day, in the morning. This landed me on a busy and fast freeway, pulled over to the side. Having experienced a serious accident about a year and a 1/2 before that, I was still working through my trauma.

In retrospect, I was in trauma response the entire time I was there, yet still present, learning and being with horses. It was fascinating to see how the program helped and to see how the horses behaved with me.

I had three profound experiences during my time practicing the programs, as a participant.

The most impactful one was during the silent exercise. Brandon kept moving in front of me, instead of beside me. Kind of cutting me off. We would try again, with me shifting my energy. We stepped away from the exercise and tried what we were doing in a separate area and he would stay beside me. We would then go back to the silent exercise and he would cut me off, perpendicular to me. He would stop with me at his belly, which was at my heart and solar plexus chakra. I never felt unsafe, or frustrated.

After a bit of time contemplating, I actually felt protected by Brandon. His energy was calm. His head was low. I felt almost held by him. We stopped and stayed in that place and in that energy for awhile. Brandon knew I needed safety. He knew I needed to be held, in his horse way. He knew I needed protection, but in a steadfast yet kind and gentle way. It was profound. I carry in my heart still.



**Tara**

## Empowerment

“To live an empowered life so you can empower others, you must simultaneously find or make the time to take care of yourself.”

No matter how crazy your days and weeks get, you must find time to take care of yourself.

This isn't a platitude or a suggestion, it is an essential component of your empowered life.

Taking days off can be hard to do in a culture that makes being busy an accepted fact of life. We are all supposed to be extremely creative, to maintain our awareness of new trends and ideas, grow our businesses, take care of those we love, and do all of this with as little rest as possible.

That is not empowered living! That is a race for which there are no winners, just a series of burned-out bodies trying to be in a predetermined place at a predetermined time.

If your purpose is to empower yourself so you can empower others, you can't do it as a numbers game.

It took me a long time to realize that it wasn't a crime to put myself first and look after all the people in my life and my business second.

It hit me one day when I was sitting in an airplane listening to the flight attendant go through the drill about securing your own oxygen mask first before reaching out to help another.

You have to help yourself first so you are able to help others.

You must nourish yourself first so you have the strength to feed others. You must take time to think and sift through ideas first so you can reach out to recognize the value in the ideas of others.

You need to exercise and dance and sleep and keep your physical body in shape so your well of energy is filled up to fuel your experiences with others.

We are conditioned to think that looking after ourselves is selfish. In modern crime dramas you see doctors and detectives alike forgoing sleep and food to save lives. They don't show you how their cognitive skills have become impaired and they make bad decisions after tearing around for 24 hours straight. They don't show you their arteries clogging from the sausages they grab from the street vendors.

We are getting an unrealistic image of what it means to live empowered.

You must help yourself first if you are to help others. It is a primary condition of empowerment. It is okay to stop for a cup of tea on your front porch in the middle of the afternoon. It is not a waste of time to eat a good breakfast before you head to the office. It is okay to say I have done enough on this day and will sleep now so I can do more tomorrow.

Kari Fulmek is the author of "Two Weeks to Empowerment" and the founder and owner of Equine Connection, The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning. She is a master instructor and senior facilitator in an International Horse Facilitator Certification Course that includes business training, the only program of its type in the world. From her base near Calgary, AB, in the foothills of Canada's Rocky Mountains, she travels the globe to empower clients. To learn more about Kari, visit her website at: <https://equineconnection.ca>.



Every morning when you wake up, consider what you would do if this was your last day on this planet. I do that everyday, and although some people think it's different, it is a wonderful way to remember what is important and keep living in the present.

***Kari Fulmek - Master Instructor - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning-***

## Live Everyday Like it Could Be Your Last

Our work at Equine Connection is about empowering the people who participate in our programs. Inevitably clients ask me how to sustain their new feelings of empowerment when they go back to their regular lifestyles.

I shocked them a little with my answer.

I say: "The real secret to living an empowered life is to take charge of every day and live it like it could be your last."

When you live for the day you are in and the moment you are in, you are more connected to the world. Yesterday, while remembered, is not considered with regret, and tomorrow, while a hopeful arrival, is not a place to postpone things to.

Living empowered for me as I grow my business and myself is not about making all the right choices. I have made as many mistakes as anyone. However, I own my choices and so I can live with them.

I have had to make bold life decisions about rebuilding a business while I was heavily in debt, about leaving relationships and moving into uncertainty, and leaving so-called steady income careers for the challenges of entrepreneurship.

But I have never waited until I thought all of life's circumstances were lined up perfectly for me to make those changes. I just jumped in and changed, and worked things out as I went along. In the process, I discovered the well of strength inside me that we all possess if we need to draw from it.

It makes me sad when people really want to do something different with their life, but they believe they must wait for some point in the future to make everything right.

All you really have to get on the course for purposeful work and an empowered

life is this day. If you waste it longing for a better life in the future, you have not moved closer to your goal; you have just let a day pass without purpose.

Do not sit on the sidelines of life arranging your ducks in a row. Jump in and lead them and they will all fall into line, just as your life circumstances will line up in support of your bold act of courage.



***Kari Fulmek - Master Instructor - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## Near Death But So Beautiful At The Same Time



I have always lived by this belief, and I always will. I can die today, so make sure it is how you want to leave this earth.

Not in a dark way. Not to be morbid. But because everything that lives will die, and when we forget that, we forget how to live. Life is brief. A blink. A breath. A thin smile thread we step onto each morning without knowing if it will hold us through the day.

Yesterday, that thread tightened.

I walked out to feed the horses like I do every single day. Same routine. Same quiet rhythm. Buckets filled, each one prepared with intention, each placed according to hierarchy because that matters to a herd. The horses came in calmly. Everything felt normal. Grounded. Familiar.

I stood in the arena by the hitching posts while they ate, doing what feeds my soul just as much as feeding them. Watching. Listening. Letting my shoulders drop. Breathing in their presence. That deep, sacred stillness where time slows and nothing else exists.

Then a sound happened.

So small it barely registered to the human ear. But to a prey animal, it was everything.

The head of the herd lifted. Ears snapped forward. And in an instant, the calm shattered. One horse moved and the entire herd responded. Flight is not a thought. It is not a choice. It is hardwired survival.

They surged toward the open back door.

I stepped forward to gather the buckets, knowing they would not return in order and each horse needs what is theirs. Three horses had already started to come back, so I ducked under the rail and bent down to grab the first bucket.

That is when every single sense in my body ignited at once.

Sound rushed in from every direction. Hooves. Breath. Movement. Energy crackling through the air. My hearing sharpened. My awareness narrowed. My body knew something before my mind could form the thought.

Then it hit.

A horse's hindquarters came into my body from behind. Twelve hundred pounds of pure movement. No warning. No time to react. No balance could have saved me.

I went down face first into the dirt, completely flat. The impact forced my body open, arms and legs spread wide like an upside down angel in the snow.

At that moment, I was fully exposed. Every part of my body is vulnerable. There was nothing to brace with, nothing to protect myself with. One wrong movement from the horse and serious injury could have followed.

Time did something strange then. It stretched and collapsed all at once. Lying there, my brain was crystal clear. Oh my gosh. They are going to trample me.

I knew I could not protect my head. I knew I could not guard my spine. There was no rolling away, no bracing, no reaction fast enough. I heard them. I felt the ground vibrate. I remember thinking, they will never do this on purpose, and at the same time knowing fear does not care about intention.

Survival takes over.

I felt hooves strike my legs. Pain shot through me. I did not know if it was front feet or back feet. I did not know what damage had been done. I remember thinking, this might be it. Dead or paralyzed. I don't know which.

And then just as suddenly as it began, it stopped.

I heard them moving away.

I exploded up off the ground, jumped to my feet, and all that came out of my mouth was Holy F. Holy F.

Heart pounding. Breath sharp. I scrambled back behind the rail, standing there trying to comprehend what had just happened.

And then something incredible occurred.

Nothing else came.

No panic. No shaking. No adrenaline surge.

Instead, there was calm. Deep calm. Steady. Peaceful.

I stood there stunned, amazed that I was okay, amazed at how still my body felt, amazed at how quiet everything inside me became. And the thought that washed over me was not fear, but gratitude.

If that had been my moment to leave this earth, I would have been doing exactly what I love, with the beings I love most. Fully present. Fully alive. Connected to something far bigger than myself. To die well is to live fully.

This experience carved three truths deeper into my bones.

First. A horse is a horse. Always. Their brain is designed for survival, not intention. There was no anger in me. No blame. Only respect. They do not want to hurt us. They want to feel safe.

Second It pains me when people say, "My horse would never do that." That belief creates danger. Any thousand to two thousand pound animal can cause harm, never out of malice, always out of instinct. Horses are not pets. They are powerful prey animals built of muscle, movement, and sensitivity. When we forget that and place them into a human mindset, we become unsafe. Too often, the horse pays the price for our misunderstanding.

I have seen horses punished for reacting. For surviving. When in truth, we failed them by not understanding their world.

Third Accidents happen.

Life can change in a breath. And when we cling to blame, unforgiveness, and what should have been, we miss the lesson. Fragility is not meant to scare us. It is meant to wake us up.

To live more fully. To forgive faster. To love deeper. To be grateful for what stands breathing in front of us.

I give thanks every single day to our Lord. And to walk this life alongside these magnificent beings He created is more joy than I sometimes feel worthy of.



Thank you for the reminder. Thank you for the lesson. Thank you for this life

***Kari Fulmek - Master  
Instructor - Equine  
Connection - The  
Academy of Equine  
Assisted Learning***

## Doubting Yourself

*“Doubt is a difficult barrier to control when you are trying to move forward. For every bit of credence you give it, it grows ten-fold. Next thing it has snuffed the life right out of you.”*

I spent more than a decade in a successful sales career before I changed my direction and took on revitalizing a rodeo attraction.

And then, at an age when most people have settled comfortably into their career, I decided to study equine assisted learning with a goal of opening my own business.

I was listening to my voice of empowerment and my intention was clear. I wanted to change what I was doing in life and move closer to the gift I felt I was given, which was to engage with horses as a means of empowering people.

I began an Equine Assisted Learning course as an on-line learning experience.

It wasn't long before doubt started clouding my vision.

I had a lot of experience working with horses that I had acquired throughout the years, but I was just not fully understanding what I was studying – like, at all.

Maybe I got this wrong, my voice of doubt suggested. Maybe I wasn't supposed to be moving in this direction in life. Maybe I wasn't able to learn what I needed to know to follow my intent.

I grasped the theory that I was reading. But I couldn't translate that theory to the practicality of truly understanding how the horse could empower me.

When you start to doubt yourself or another person, it is the fastest growing sentiment on the planet. For every second you spend doubting yourself, the impact is measured 1000 percent.

I almost quit, and that would have stopped me from realizing my true gift in life and living a life full of purpose and joy.

Now I suggest to people that before they abandon what you feel is the right intent, they should ask themselves: Is it the idea or the execution of it that is not working? Am I on the right road for my life journey, but using the wrong vehicle to transport myself?

I decided my idea was valid and my intent was clear, but my execution was wrong.

I went to the training facility to see firsthand how this program worked and whether it could really be the right business for me. I was even told I could get my money back if I changed my mind and it still didn't work for me. That was another sign that I was moving in the right direction.

I ended up making two more trips to the training facility to find peace with my new direction and learn more about Equine Assisted Learning. I was entranced and totally impressed with what I saw. I knew that the horses truly were the teachers, and they had the power to fuel others.

Time has shown that my idea and intention were sound, but my original execution was wrong for me. If I had quit at the first barrier, I would never have known the joy of operating a business that I am still committed to 200 percent every day.

I would have missed the chance to do the purposeful work that is my gift, and the opportunity to share it and empower others.

So if you have an idea and an intention, don't walk away at the first bump in the road. Step back and ask yourself first if you are doing it right. Is there any other road to take you where you want to go?

“By understanding why and how horses are aware of every movement, you will come to know how effective equine-assisted learning programs are in finding success.”



***Kari Fulmek - Master Instructor - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***

## The Beginning

Marketing the idea that horses can empower people was an uphill climb when I first started my business Equine Connection in 2009.

The whole premise of experiential learning has only come into the spotlight in more recent years. The factor that is probably the most important in understanding how it all works is to remember that horses are prey animals. By their nature, they live totally in the moment, watching every movement and every nuance around them to react if they feel the need.

They respond to the stimulus they receive from the body language and participants need to adjust their inner feelings and behaviours to work successfully with the horses. If you utter a command to a horse but your voice lacks conviction and your body language conveys hesitancy, they will ignore you.

The horse does not consider your motive or make adjustments for your behaviour as a human teacher does. They cannot be manipulated with clever words that cover hidden actions or motivations.

Their feedback is honest and instant. If they don't want to be with you, they will simply walk away.

Because they are naturally herd animals as well, they also require trust and respect and teamwork.

If you try to dictate to them or your intent is not clear, they will be confused.

Like human beings, no one horse is just the same as another horse. You have to learn in different ways from different horses.

Historically in Indigenous cultures, the horse was considered the teller of truth. The spirit of the horse was believed to lead individuals in the right direction and assist people in finding their place in the circle of life.

By including horses in specially designed educational experiences, we can magnify the learning potential for our participants. As certified facilitators who listen to the horses' non-verbal messages, we can walk our participants through a life-altering experience to lasting change and empowerment.

If you are at a crossroads in your life, or you are heading down a road that feels wrong on your life journey, you can find clarity through our programs. If you are considering a series of options and are finding it difficult to make a wise decision, you will also find the insight you are seeking.

Once you find the gift that is within you and bring it forward to use in your unique way, you will truly be empowered.



***Kari Fulmek - Master Instructor-  
Equine Connection - The  
Academy of Equine Assisted  
Learning***

## No!

“Being empowered means you feel able to act to serve your best interests. It’s stronger than self-confidence and different from selfishness. It starts with knowing yourself and your gift, and it grows from there.”

Because I am empowered, I am able to say something that many people go through life too scared to utter.

That is the word “no.”

To dare to say that word, you have to know yourself and what you need to do to live your life fully. You need to understand what your purposeful work is on this planet and what your special gift contributes to that work. You have to know who you need the energy to take care of and love (including yourself) and the best way to spend the short time we all have on this planet.

When you know all of those things and someone asks you to sit on a committee that doesn’t interest you, you have no trouble at all using the word “no.” You can veto efforts to take on extra chores that others can do better, and refuse to assume work that is not part of your life plan.

Self-empowerment means that you have enough confidence in your own skills and abilities to direct them to where they are most effective. It means that you value your life sufficiently to avoid spending it on things that don’t interest you or help you create value for others.

Sometimes self-empowerment seems very close to self-assurance or self-confidence. They are all related, but the source of your true strength is self-empowerment.

How do you cultivate it? You open yourself up to the teachers around you and the gift within you.

My teachers were horses and through them I understood that my real work was to empower others.

Yours may be to pull out a talent and begin to cultivate it to create something that greatly enhances the culture around you.

Every way is different, but the formula is the same. Start with an action and watch it grow! Be aware of the moment you are in and how it contributes to the life you desire. Look at the ways you can move the strength within you to support the life you want.

Move gradually over the barriers that suggest you can't do something until you reach the place where you start to figure out how to do it and believe that you can. From there it is a short journey to accomplishing it. It's a simple formula and yet it works wonderfully.

Who acts in your best interests? You do. Emphasis on "acts."



***Kari Fulmek - Master  
Instructor- Equine  
Connection - The  
Academy of Equine  
Assisted Learning***

## Carolyn's Story

If you would have told me ten years ago that one day I would be working with horses facilitating life skills, I would have called you a liar. I'm a little different than most of the people that have done this course in the fact that I had no horse experience – and never really had a desire previously to get any. I had grown up with dogs and thought that was good enough. It was not until Kari asked me to come on board to help with marketing and technology stuff that I started to truly understand the teaching power that they possess.

So initially Kari asked me to come out to Saskatchewan with her to see some programs and meet the program designer. So I went out and it was cold. I don't deal well with being cold and I don't hide it well either, so Kari was very aware that I was not super impressed with being there. At first, I didn't get it. All of these people were so in love with the horses and talking about how amazing they were, but I hadn't yet connected the dots. In fact, they kind of freaked me out. They were huge and I also found out that I am fairly allergic to them as well. It wasn't until I got to watch them in action that it really "clicked".

As I stood back watching the teens working with the horses, the team leaders for the youth program were chatting with me. They were telling me the stories of these children – where they had come from, the things that they had done, the challenges that they faced and how "troubled" they were. But these were not the teens I was seeing in front of me. I watched intently as the horses reacted to the situations that the groups were in and reacted to the authentic stimulus of the client and I finally got it! I witnessed first hand how the clients reacted with these beautiful creatures and how they truly listened to them to create a change within themselves.

That night, Kari and I went out for dinner and she asked what I thought. If I was in for helping her with this project. Now, I am not a cryer. Never have been. But

something about the day had touched my heart and started a new path and passion and I actually started to cry as I said, "Yes! I am absolutely in!"

From there, it was a bit of a learning curve. There was a lot of fear to get over and a lot of skills to build and the place that I was at in life wasn't necessarily a happy one. At first I was up in Leduc doing marketing. While I was there I had my beautiful daughter (the light of my life) and ended up with post-partum depression. I didn't have any friends around and came home to Calgary as often as I possibly could as I felt very alone. My self esteem was as low as it had ever been – not like it had ever been that high – and although I had confidence, and outwardly people would never have known what a dark place I was in, I was a shell of a human being.

After about a year of living in Leduc, we were thankfully transferred back to Calgary (woohoo!) When I moved back home I thought things would get better. Maybe my problems would all be solved! Well turns out that isn't the way life works. I was still in a pretty rough place in life. Shortly after we moved home, a huge blow hit and suddenly my marriage was over. I felt lost, betrayed and like a failure. Now what? I didn't even know who I was anymore. How would I move forward? How would I support my daughter and I as I was making very little money at this point.

So Kari came over and helped me make a plan. We figured out what she could pay me to make it work, but I was going from a six figure household income to a significantly less household income. I panicked. I wasn't sure if I could continue on with EAL. Did I need to get a different job?

So I needed to think on all of this, and at this point I was a certified facilitator and working with the horses regularly and facilitating programs. However, the horses were not exactly working with me the same way. Every time I worked with the horses – any horse – they would bite me. Or push me around. And I don't mean like little bites. I went home everyday looking like a leopard.

It's odd. Anytime in life before this, I would have quit. I would have thought that it was a sign to go and get another job and I'm not sure why my brain didn't go there, but I knew that they were reacting to the twisted mess that my insides were at that point.

About three weeks later, Kari (who had been incredibly patient up to that point) told me she needed an answer. So I went home that weekend in complete turmoil, not knowing what I was going to do. I don't know what happened – I don't even know the moment that I made the decision but I decided that if mama is happy, baby is happy. This was my passion. I needed to do this, for me. So I went in to work on Monday and told Kari that I was in for the long haul. I was never bitten again by a single horse.

If it weren't for me recognizing the teaching that the horses were trying to do with me, I would have quit. I would have aborted my passion and probably be working behind a desk somewhere today. To this day, they are my greatest teachers. I have grown as a person because of them. Because I could step into being the leader of my own life. A leader to myself. Believing that I am worth more. I know that the horses believed in me and my capabilities enough to take the time to bite the crap out of me for three weeks. Being a facilitator is not just about changing the lives of others, but taking a journey to change your own life. I love my job. I love my life and I love the person that I have become. I am confident and I have self esteem. I know now that this is the greatest thing I could have done for myself – to take the teachings of the horse to heart and to find out the answers that truly matter to find my authentic self.

***Carolyn Charles - Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning***



## Cassandra's Story

### Finding Purpose Through Equine Connection

Pursuing certification through **Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning** was a transformative decision. It wasn't just about achieving a professional milestone—it was about embracing a deeper level of connection, understanding, and growth. Having spent over 40 years immersed in the equine world—training, competing in pro rodeos, buying, selling, and everything in between—I thought I knew it all. But Equine Connection opened my eyes to a whole new dimension of horse communication and energy.

I dove into the program with the goal of aligning with industry standards, improving my skills, and building a supportive network to guide me without the endless trial and error. What I gained was more than I had ever imagined. The certification wasn't just a badge of professionalism; it became a foundation for my confidence, my business, and even my relationship with my horses.

### A Shift in Mindset

One of the most enlightening moments came during the training when I learned to shift my language and perspective. Instead of “using” my horses, I now partner with them. That simple shift in mindset created a powerful and authentic relationship with my equine partners. My horses began to thrive in their roles as teachers, responding with a level of confidence I hadn't seen before. Their growth mirrored my own as I gained clarity and purpose through the program.

## Growth and Success

Since completing my certification, my revenue has nearly doubled—a testament to the confidence I've gained and the opportunities the program has unlocked. The ripple effect of this newfound confidence is extraordinary. With the increased income, I've been able to invest in barn renovations and enhance the care and environment for my horses.

The community aspect of Equine Connection is unparalleled. Through their platform, Workplace, I've had access to invaluable resources, from practical business advice to marketing support. No question feels too small, and no stone is left unturned. The guidance and shared knowledge have empowered me to create a thriving business that serves both my clients and my horses.

## Advice for Those Considering Certification

If I could offer one piece of advice, it would be this: **Don't hesitate.** Invest in yourself. You are worth the time, money, and resources it takes to grow. The more you pour into yourself, the more you can pour into others. It's a cycle of growth and giving that aligns with your true purpose.

Equine Connection has given me everything I need to succeed—not just in business but as a servant leader who prioritizes the well-being of others. My goals for 2025 are ambitious: I aim to double the number of youth groups I serve. With the tools, support, and community I've gained through Equine Connection, I'm confident in achieving them.

## Gratitude and Purpose

This journey has been about so much more than certification. It has been about stepping into my purpose, building a business rooted in authenticity, and forging

a stronger bond with the incredible animals I partner with every day. Equine Connection has been a guiding light, helping me create a thriving, purpose-driven business that truly serves.

To Kari, Carolyn, and the entire Equine Connection - The Academy of Equine Assisted Learning Academy community—thank you for the knowledge, encouragement, and inspiration. This journey has changed my life, and I know it will continue to open doors for years to come.



**Cassandra**

## Chapter Nine

### Conclusion

We really are life changers

Equine Assisted Learning brings satisfaction to people's lives. In subtle ways we are able to understand ourselves better through the energy of the horses and the “don't bullshit me” attitude they present. Horses will only communicate with the authentic, they will respond to those who are true to themselves as we've seen throughout this book.

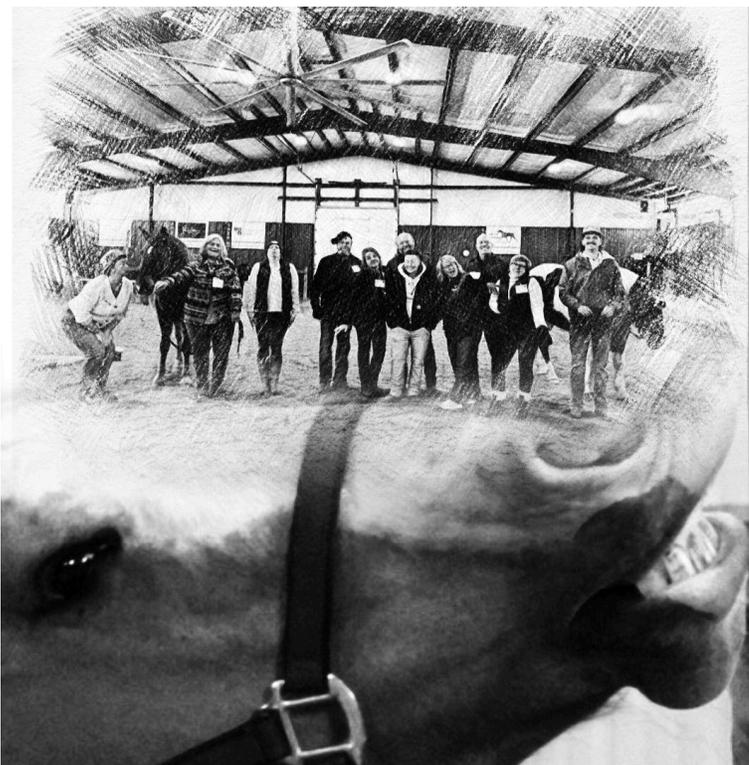
Horses respond to head and heart connection and help us be in a good state of heart rate variability. We sync with a horse's heartbeat which slows ours down after twenty minutes in their presence, placing us in a good heart rate variability. It's an explained phenomenon, one that has been recorded at the HeartMath Institute in California. Being in a state of HRV is simply the body's stress response, recovery and overall health. When we're at a good HRV we are less likely to have heart disease, diabetes and depression. This is what horses do for us when we're in their presence.

Throughout the experiences we've noticed that all have become open to their own responses. They've found out why they were in that state. Horses helped them to find the answers that were within themselves. Through questions and the safety of being with a horse whose magnetic field is five times the size of ours. We delve deeper due to the energy that we are wrapped within, our own and the horses. This places us in a state of empowerment. We find ourselves thinking clearer, again due to the good HRV. With a clear mind comes clarity and enlightenment.

During a session, even though it is a brief time in one's life, we are able to reconnect with ourselves. When we do this we become more open to connecting with others. There are many states of mind and emotions that block us from clear communication. These heightened emotions put us into a state of confusion and can place us into a place of distrust. Through the eyes of a horse and their primitive fight or flight state of survival, we find ourselves in a place of strength. Only the here and now can offer either safety or harm. We are able to quickly decipher where we are at, especially within ourselves and why.

We hold all of the answers. Horses help us to find them.

Thank you for reading our journey through this beautiful practice of being beside horses to help humans have better health and wellness.



***Krystyna Faroe***

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